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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ISSUES IN THE STUDY OF MEANING IN LIFE

BY

DAVID E. D. REDEKOPP

©

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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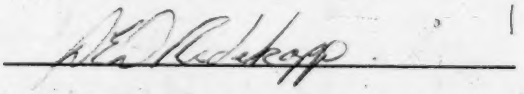

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ABSTRACT

Theory and research regarding meaning in life is criticized in order to clarify important concerns and to suggest integrated and developmental directions for future study. Central theories of meaning in life are reviewed that view meaning as consciously found outside the person, consciously found within the person, consciously created by the person, and consciously and unconsciously created by the person. These theories are criticized from the perspective that meaning in life is a phenomenon comprised of processes that lead to specific outcomes while being constrained by various structural elements.

Meaning in life is also reviewed from an historical perspective utilizing ten phases of "cultural semiogenesis" that characterize important shifts in cultural meaning-making. The source of meaning is examined from the perspectives of the central theories and it is argued that theories contending that meaning is a human creation are philosophically more convincing than theories that conceive meaning to be an objective feature of reality. The processes of meaning-making are argued to be conscious and unconscious, developmental and restricted by structural elements. Structural influences on meaning-making are

reviewed that include genetic endowment, environmental conditions, past experience, level of cognition, personal needs and personality characteristics. Descriptions of meaning outcomes are reviewed, and it is argued that meaning sustains and creates personal satisfaction while producing both positive and negative psychological outcomes. It is argued that meaninglessness is not a necessarily harmful condition.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Meaning in life enables individuals to envision existence as worthwhile. Whether viewed as a human need (e.g., Maslow, 1966), an external "pull" (e.g., Frankl, 1984), a mental creation (e.g., Stein, 1983) or the very ground of human development (e.g., Kegan, 1984), meaning is capable of changing individual lives.

Meaning is worthy of theoretical, empirical and experiential investigation. In the twentieth century, this investigation has been initiated and sustained primarily by existential psychologists, who posit "meaning" as one of their central constructs (e.g., Frankl, 1984). However, as holds true for many philosophical constructs in the existential tradition (e.g., "being," "nothingness," "being-in-the-world"), "meaning in life" is ill-defined for the purposes of theoretical and empirical psychology. Lack of clarity is particularly troublesome because meaning in life is promoted as conducive to health in therapeutic applications (e.g., Frankl's logotherapy): that is, "meaning in life" is not a merely academic concern.

This work analyzes issues in the study of meaning in life for the purposes of criticizing certain points of view, clarifying important concerns in the area, and suggesting directions for future study. The intent is to begin a

unification process wherein researchers who currently study meaning from a variety of disparate perspectives may conceptualize meaning within a more encompassing framework. Meaning in life is too important to the human condition to be studied from disjointed and narrow viewpoints.

The Problem of the Study of Meaning in Life

Many theoretical and empirical issues regarding "meaning in life" remain unresolved. For example, the meaning of "meaning in life" is not clear. "Meaning in life" has been used synonymously with "purpose in life," "calling in life," "mission in life" (e.g., Maslow, 1966) and "positive life regard" (Battista & Almond, 1973). All but the last term have also been used to define meaning in life. Among the most influential proponents of the psychological importance of meaning in life, Viktor Frankl (1960a, 1960b, 1965, 1966, 1969, 1975, 1984), described "meaning" primarily through analogy and example. Frankl's (1969) attempt to formulate a concise definition, "meaning is what is meant" (p. 62), adds little precision to our conceptual understanding of "meaning in life."

The confusion in understanding the meaning and nature of "meaning in life" has led to many unresolved theoretical, empirical and practical problems. The variety and difficulty of these problems have caused some theorists to call for abandoning "meaning in life" and "meaning" as

useful theoretical constructs. This attack on "meaning" is not a recent one -- in 1927, Mary Whiton Calkins began a paper with the statement:

> I write in the hope of persuading here and there a psychologist, at present addicted to the use of the term 'meaning,' to expel from his professional vocabulary this highly ambiguous, unnecessary, and often misleading word. (p. 7)

In a more gentle manner, Edwin Guthrie (1924) argued that terms such as "purpose" and "meaning" were of little value to psychologists:

> [A mechanistic psychologist] will never be contented because his laws will never be absolutely precise, but he is more apt to have contributed to their relative precision than the psychologist who is satisfied with the vague indeterminism of purposive descriptions. (p. 681)

Six decades later, Calkin's and Guthrie's claim that the study of meaning is too imprecise to assist in the prediction of behaviour could be made with equal vigour. "Meaning" <u>is</u> an ambiguous and non-observable concept. However, "meaning" also plays a central role in the human conception the world. Regardless of the alleged desirability of explaining all behaviour with mechanistic and physiological causes, a point made by Edward Tolman

(1925) remains valid:

> We wish to point out that in adopting such purpose and cognition categories as a substitute for the usual stock, physiological ones of synaptic resistance and conditioned reflex, we are not denying that the physiological concepts will ultimately prove the more comprehensive and accurate.... But the date at which this last will be possible is far distant. (p. 296)

Six decades later, it can be argued that the ability to explain human behaviour in a reductionistic manner will not be developed in the near future. On purely practical grounds then, concepts such as "meaning" and "purpose" remain worthy of investigation. However, there is a more important reason that these terms must remain within the psychologist's professional vocabulary.

Calkins (1927), Guthrie (1924), Tolman (1925) and many others since have been arguing from an ontologically and epistemologically confused base. Meaning is of an ontologically different order than the observable data of empirical science. Meaning is not within the realm of the empirical, if "empirical" means "capable of detection by the five human senses or their extensions" (Wilber, 1983, p. 4), and it cannot be reduced to the realm of the empirical. Meaning is within the realm of ideas, not the realm of things. The attempt to reduce meaning to the workings of

neural circuits is thus misguided. Ken Wilber put the matter bluntly:

> If all human activity is reducible to biochemical activity, then so is [the statement that all human activity is reducible to biochemical activity]. So, in fact, are all statements equally biochemical fireworks. But there could then be no question of a true statement versus a false statement, because all thoughts are equally biochemistry. (p. 30)

The conclusion that meaning is not reducible to the empirical holds the epistemological implication that meaning cannot be known empirically. Mental inquiry rather than empirical inquiry is the method by which reliable knowledge regarding meaning will be obtained. Meaning is an object of study for the mind, not the senses. Consequently, although there is enormous difficulty in coming to theoretical grips with "purpose," "meaning" and "meaning in life," the attempt will necessarily continue to be made.

The discipline of psychology will necessarily continue to be concerned with "meaning." In this work, efforts in one component of this task, the study of "meaning in life," are reviewed and analyzed. The intent is to examine the most prominent issues and ascertain the utility of the various perspectives on meaning in life. Another intent is to begin a process by which meaning can be examined from a

balanced and integrated perspective. Researchers in the area have displayed a tendency to conceptually latch onto one specific aspect of meaning in life, become one-sided in their approach, and thus lose sight of broader issues that influence meaning in life. It could be argued that this tendency is prevalent throughout psychology as highly specialized areas of study become the norm rather than the exception.

To bring cohesion to the numerous aspects involved in the study of meaning in life, this work is organized around a conceptual framework that understands meaning in life to be more than a possession (e.g., "I <u>have</u> meaning in life") or an object (e.g., "I've <u>found</u> meaning in life") and more than an arbitrary and unrestricted process (e.g., "I'll <u>make</u> whatever meaning of it that I choose"). As conceptualized here, "meaning in life" is comprised of <u>processes</u> that are influenced by <u>structures</u> that lead to certain <u>outcomes</u>. "Processes" refer to the activities that are involved in creating meaning: that is, they are the "how" of meaning in life. "Structures" refer to the influences beyond the individual's immediate control (e.g., personality characteristics). Structures serve to enhance or limit the processes of making meaning. "Outcomes" refer to the products or effects produced by the processes of meaning in life.

The outcome-process-structure conceptualization of meaning in life is by no means the only appropriate way to categorize the numerous issues regarding meaning in life. However, it serves as a useful conceptual tool in analyzing a wide array of seemingly unrelated issues surrounding the study of meaning in life, and it illustrates the inherent complexity of the phenomenon. Meaning in life is not simply something that one "has" or "doesn't have." What one "has" or "doesn't have" with respect to meaning is merely a symptom or sign that a complex set of events has occurred.

There is a personal agenda that has influenced the direction and tone of this study. My hope is that a truly developmental and global perspective of meaning in life will someday be created, one in which meaning in life is neither romanticized nor reduced to lower forms, conceived as neither the panacea for all ills nor dismissed as unimportant, and understood to be intertwined with areas in psychology dealing with physiology, learning theory, development, personality, semiotics, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and linguistics. Meaning in life is but one aspect of meaning, and meaning is a central component of all human activity.

Overview of the Study

Chapter II: Central Theories of Meaning in Life

Prominent conceptions of "meaning in life" are reviewed

in this chapter, not for the purpose of providing an exhaustive review, but to introduce the reader to the main conceptualizations of meaning in life. The term "meaning" is examined from the perspectives of both linguistic/cognitive approaches and emotional/psychological approaches. The various theories of meaning in life are categorized regarding their position on the source of meaning (i.e., meaning as found or meaning as created) and the awareness of the source of meaning (i.e., conscious or unconscious). Theories of meaning are shown to differ most significantly according to where they lie on these two dimensions. Frankl's (1966, 1969, 1984) theory is reviewed as one that understands meaning to be consciously found outside the person. Maslow (1966, 1968, 1970, 1971) adopted the stance that meaning is consciously found within the person. Several theorists are reviewed that conceived meaning to be a consciously created projection onto the world, including Blocker (1974), Wilber (1977, 1980, 1983) and Yalom (1980). Stein (1983) and Kegan (1984) are reviewed as theorists who understand meaning to be both unconsciously and consciously created.

The perspectives reviewed in this chapter are not arranged in any specific hierarchical arrangement; evaluation of these perspectives is conducted in the remainder of the study. Theories are reviewed to provide an

overview of the area, and to assist the reader to ascertain how existing theories are interpreted in this study.

Chapter III: Cultural Semiogenesis -- An Historical Examination of Meaning in Life

"Cultural semiogenesis" is coined in this chapter to refer to the historical evolution of meaning in life from a cultural perspective. This chapter traces the broad changes in "meaning in life" in Western civilization from about 200,000 years ago to the present, and it predicts the subsequent evolution of meaning into the next two centuries. Ten phases of semiogenesis are described, their progression characterized by increased consciousness, increased teleonomy (self-directed purpose) and proactivity, increased realization of the projective nature of meaning, and changing emotional responses to meaning and meaninglessness.

The chapter does not provide a definitive description of the evolution of meaning. The purpose of the description of cultural semiogenesis is to establish a mind-set that conceives meaning to be changing, and changing in a specific direction.

Chapter IV: The Source of Meaning

The direction of the study of meaning in life hinges upon the position adopted regarding its source. In Chapter IV, the argument for meaning as an objective aspect of the world is compared to the position that meaning is a human

projection onto the world. Both Frankl (1966, 1969, 1984) and Maslow (1968, 1971) understood meaning to possess an objectivity of its own. The advantages and disadvantages of their respective stances are reviewed, and it is shown that the contention that meaning is objective is not theoretically compelling. Theories contending that meaning is a human creation (Blocker, 1974; Kegan, 1984; Stein, 1983; Wilber, 1977; Yalom, 1980) are also analyzed with special focus on their theoretical strengths and weaknesses. Although problems are found with this position, in this thesis it is argued that the view that meaning is a human projection is philosophically more convincing than the conception that meaning is an objective feature of reality.

Chapter V: The Process of Creating Meaning in Life

Several issues regarding how meaning is created are reviewed in this chapter. Of considerable import is the role of human consciousness in the meaning-making processes. Although many theorists argue that creating meaning is an entirely conscious process (e.g., Frankl, 1984; Yalom, 1980), there is evidence to suggest that powerful meanings are also created unconsciously (e.g., Stein, 1983). The relative strengths of conscious and unconscious processes are not adjudicated in the chapter, but it is concluded that both processes are important contributors to meaning.

In this chapter, the creation of meaning in life is

compared to the production of linguistic meaning. Language development is shown to play an important role in the creation of meaning in life as it provides a central tool by which meaning is made. It is argued that meaning in life is partially bound by the restrictions of language and the societal symbol-systems that are intertwined with language. Kegan's (1984) developmental approach to meaning is reviewed as a useful way of approaching the relationships between meaning in life and other meaning systems. It is argued that Kegan's theory is currently too general to be especially useful, but the style of the approach possesses merit.

The perspective that meaning in life is a specific form of meaning in general is reviewed in this chapter. Mitchell's (1975) developmental analysis of meaning in life provides a means by which the creation of meaning can be understood as a dynamic process that changes with developing cognition and affect. Frankl's (e.g., 1984) understanding that meaning in life is a unitary phenomenon is shown to be inadequate within a developmental perspective. Hedlund's (1987) study of the changing nature of meaning in life is reviewed as a positive approach to the study of meaning in life. Hedlund found that meaning in life changes with development, moving from self-centred meanings to other-directed meanings. It thus appears that there are levels of

meaning in life.

Hypotheses regarding the development of meaning-making processes are presented in this chapter. It is proposed that there are significant restrictions on the ability to make meaning, but that these restrictions lessen with normal development. As the restrictions lessen, individuals become increasingly capable of telenomic self-direction in their meaning-making. Restrictions or "structures" that influence the meaning-making process include developmental changes such as cognitive transformations, as well as influences of past experience.

Chapter VI: The Structural Components of Making Meaning

This chapter addresses the restrictions or structures that influence meaning-making processes. The structures include genetic endowment, environmental conditions, past experience, level of cognition, personal needs, and personality characteristics. Mitchell's (1975) study of the effect of cognitive change in adolescence on meaning in life is reviewed, and the approach is expanded to include possible effects of other cognitive changes, particularly the shift from formal operations to postformal operations.

The chapter also reviews research that has examined the relationships between meaning in life and pathology, personal characteristics and early experience. It is shown that meaning in life is partially dependent on these

structural elements, and it is also argued that research efforts have been insufficiently systematic in uncovering relationships between meaning in life processes and structural components of meaning.

The influence of environmental constraints on meaning in life are also briefly reviewed in Chapter VI. It is argued that an individual's circumstances exert a powerful influence on the making and fulfilling of meaning, and thus all meanings incorporate Frankl's (1969) attitudinal values. Individuals may create meaning through work and love, as Frankl contended, but their ability to do so is largely dependent on their attitude toward their circumstances.

Chapter VII: The Outcomes of Meaning-Making

Chapter VII addresses the experience of meaning in life as well as the effects of meaning in life. Excerpts of various individuals' descriptions of their meanings are shown to illustrate the variety of experiences associated with meaning in life. Meaning in life is shown to sustain the satisfaction of fulfilling experiences such as being loved, esteemed or secure. Also, meaning in life creates satisfaction from events that involve personal sacrifice or displeasure such as taking pains to take care of another individual. It is maintained, however, that meaning is not necessary to satisfaction. Further, a case is made that the anxiety and despair associated with meaninglessness is

largely the product of the cultural expectation that meaning is necessary to satisfaction.

The effects of creating meaning in life are also analyzed. Although most researchers have focused on the positive outcomes of meaning, such as stress-reduction (Antonovsky, 1987), self-transcendence (Frankl, 1969), self-actualization (Maslow, 1966) and the correction of pathologies, it is contended that meaning in life can produce negative outcomes such as the avoidance of reality, premature and unstable self-transcendence, need-fixation and developmental arrest.

Chapter VIII: Integration and Implications

This chapter summarizes the main issues of the study in an attempt to synthesize the wide variety of problems reviewed. It also contains suggestions regarding the impact of the study's findings on future research possibilities, theoretical directions and therapeutic applications.

CHAPTER II

CENTRAL THEORIES OF MEANING IN LIFE

The concept of "meaning in life" is conceived in various ways. This chapter presents a survey of the various definitions and conceptions of "meaning in life," with specific attention being directed to theorists' understanding of meaning in developmental terms. The development of meaning in life is focused on because it will become a prominent part of the discussion in later chapters. The purpose of the review is to provide the reader with a broad understanding of the foundations of theory regarding "meaning in life," rather than to exhaustively cover the extensive literature in the area.

Conceptions of "Meaning in Life"

Blocker (1974) noted that there are two general approaches to the term "meaning." First, "meaning" is approached as an important term in the study of linguistics. This understanding of meaning is an intellectual one, largely devoid of emotional influence. "Meaning" and "meaninglessness" are terms used to refer to the relative sensibility or insensibility of linguistic constructions. The second view of "meaning" takes a psychological stance toward the term. Existential philosophers (e.g., Camus, 1960; Sartre, 1956), the most prominent adherents of this

second stance, conceive "meaning" and "meaninglessness" to be components of the human condition that powerfully influence human thought, emotion and action. For existentialists, "meaning" refers to the relative worthwhileness of human existence. The concern of the present study is with the psychological approach to "meaning" and consequently, this chapter addresses linguistic conceptions only minimally. However, it will become apparent later in the chapter that the two approaches to "meaning" are not as disparate as traditionally viewed, and thus some references to linguistic views of "meaning" are necessary to help fully develop the psychological conceptions of "meaning."

From the psychological perspective, "meaning" generally refers to the sensibility of human existence, or "meaning in life." However, Yalom (1980) noted that "meaning in life," which refers to the coherence of one's life, is generally used as a synonym for "purpose in life," which refers to the intention or aim of one's life. Yalom argued that "purpose" is subsumed within the scope of "meaning" because a sense of coherence generally produces a sense of intention. For the most part, the terms are used synonymously because the possession of meaning in life or purpose in life enables individuals to experience existence as worthwhile. For the moment, then, "meaning in life," "purpose in life," "mission

in life," and "calling in life" are used as equivalent concepts. In the most general sense, I will use Battista's and Almond's (1973) understanding of "meaning in life," or "positive life regard," as they called it, which they created by amalgamating the most prominent views of "meaning." "Meaning in life" is a concept held by an individual that requires a belief in something, an understanding of something, a commitment to something and a relationship to something. This definition will be used throughout the following review.

There are many ways of grappling with the concept of "meaning in life." In order to organize these conceptions, I categorize approaches to meaning according to where they fall on two dimensions. The first dimension is concerned with the source of meaning. Most theories of meaning understand meaning to be an objective aspect of the world (e.g., Frankl, 1969), an objective aspect of the person (e.g., Maslow, 1966) or a personal projection onto the world (e.g., Yalom, 1980). On the source dimension, meaning is understood to be either found or created. The second dimension is concerned with awareness of the source of meaning. Some theorists argue that acquiring meaning in life is a conscious process whereas others maintain that meaning has primarily unconscious origins (however, even those holding the latter view agree that meaning is

consciously perceived). Viewing approaches to meaning this way results in four categories of conceptions: (a) meaning as consciously found outside of the person (e.g., Frankl, 1969), (b) meaning as consciously found within the person (e.g., Maslow, 1966), (c) meaning as consciously created by the person (e.g., Yalom, 1980), and (d) meaning as unconsciously created by the person (e.g., Stein, 1983). This categorization illustrates where the major points of argument are in the study of meaning and it highlights the difficulties in arriving at a suitable conception of meaning.

There are numerous other ways of categorizing approaches to meaning in life. For example, theories of meaning can be grouped into "structural" or "process" categories. Theorists who conceive meaning to be found rather than created tend to take a structural stance toward meaning: that is, they conceive a person to have particular characteristics that are most appropriately suited to a specific meaning. The closer the "fit" between the person's nature and the acquired meaning, the more suitable the meaning for the person. "Process" theorists are those who understand meaning to be chosen rather than discovered. For these theorists, meaning-making is a creative process that can be on-going and thus, subject to change.

The process/structure distinction is a useful one that

will be referred to again later. For the present, the four-part categorization scheme will be used to review the major approaches to meaning in life.

Meaning as Consciously Found Outside the Person

Frankl (1966, 1969, 1984) is perhaps the most widely recognized advocate of the view that meaning in life is a conscious process of discovery. In his words, "meanings are discovered but not invented" (1969, p. 60). According to Frankl, meaning is "out there" in the world, and the search for one's idiosyncratic meaning in life is a primary human motive. "Motive" is perhaps not the best term to use here because Frankl did not conceive meaning to be a motive in the traditional sense of a "drive." Rather, Frankl (1966) claimed that

> it is one of the immediate data of life experience that man is pushed by drives but pulled by meaning, and this implies that it is always up to him to decide whether or not he wishes to fulfill it. Thus, meaning fulfillment always implies decision-making. (p. 100)

Humans possess a "will to meaning" rather than a "drive to meaning," and thus it is clear that Frankl did not understand the fulfilment of meaning to result in homeostasis. The "pull" of meaning maintains its force even when meaning is being fulfilled. Meaning is clearly outside of individuals, and it is up to them to decide whether or

not to be "pulled" by it.

According to Frankl (1966, 1969, 1984), meaning is fulfilled through three broad sources of values: creative, experiential and attitudinal values. Creative values bring an individual to produce, create and achieve, usually through some form of work. Experiential values incorporate positive human experiences such as love and the appreciation of beauty. Attitudinal values pull individuals to choose their stance toward external conditions, such as by facing unavoidable suffering with courage.

The three sources of values are not psychological in origin, according to Frankl (1969). Frankl conceived meaning in life to be a spiritual or "noogenic" concern. This understanding of meaning as spiritual resulted in Frankl describing meaning as "outside" the individual and "in the world," waiting to be discovered. To Frankl, meanings are not arbitrary human creations; rather, meanings possess an objective reality of their own. Their objectivity does not render them finite, however. There are an infinite number of meanings available for individuals to fulfil. Each situation that an individual encounters is a potentially meaningful one, and it is the responsibility of the individual to discern the "true" meaning of any given situation. According to Frankl, "there is only one meaning to each situation, and this is its true meaning" (1969, p.

61).

The inherent meanings of contexts are ascertained through the conscience, which Frankl (1969) defined as the intuitive ability to find "true" meanings. The conscience is not infallible, however, and thus individuals cannot assess the truth value of their chosen meanings with certainty. Regardless of the inherent uncertainty in discerned meanings, Frankl maintained that individuals must be whole-hearted in their pursuit of meaning fulfilment. When individuals do not pursue meaning, or when they do so in a half-hearted way, they experience an existential vacuum, or meaninglessness. Under prolonged conditions, the experience of meaninglessness can lead to existential or "noogenic" neurosis, a condition manifested by boredom and apathy. When individuals pursue meaning in a whole-hearted way, they experience "self-transcendence." To Frankl, self-transcendence ensues when humans are directed towards something external to themselves.

To summarize Frankl's (1966, 1969, 1984) position, the primary human motive is the will to find meaning. Meaning is inherent in all situations, but its pursuit depends on conscious choice. Meaning is everywhere, but "true" meanings are personal and idiosyncratic. However, although each meaning is unique, there are three general values from which meanings are derived. Creative values involve

individuals giving something to the world. Experiential values involve individuals acquiring something from the world. Attitudinal values involve the stance the individuals take towards the world. When an individual does not fulfil one of these three values, an existential vacuum is experienced, and, if prolonged and exacerbated, existential neurosis may result. When an individual fulfils one of these values, self-transcendence results. To Frankl, the possession of meaning in life promotes psychological health.

The above discussion does not contain references to the development of meaning. Frankl's (1966, 1969, 1984) concerns have focused largely on adults, and he has attended to developmental aspects of meaning only minimally. In the only reference to the development of meaning that I could find, Frankl (1969) maintained that the "will to meaning" is present in childhood, but does not fully manifest itself until later in development (presumably, in adolescence). In the same passage, Frankl footnotes Bassiss (unpublished paper), who claimed that the "will to meaning" was "the reason that the infant so eagerly seeks new experiences, experiments with himself and his environment, is continually creative and innovative and develops his human potentials" (p. 42). Frankl thus acknowledges that meaning does not emerge "full blown" in adulthood, but he does little to

explain its development.

Meaning as Consciously Found within the Person

Abraham Maslow (1966, 1968, 1970, 1971) conceived meaning in life differently than Frankl. To Maslow, the values described by Frankl exist as potentialities within the human organism. However, some conditions are necessary before these values fully emerge and begin to influence human motivation. To Maslow, "lower" concerns of physiological maintenance, safety, love and esteem require resolution before the values associated with "self-actualization" become significant motivational forces. Until "lower" needs are satisfied, values and meaning in life play a relatively small role in motivation. When lower needs are largely satisfied, values become motivational forces that result in individuals dedicating themselves to some "mission" or "cause." Individuals find meanings in the chosen tasks because their inherent values are able to be fulfilled. Without the fulfilment of values, individuals become ill.

> The state of being without a system of values is psychopathogenic, we are learning. The human being needs a framework of values, a philosophy of life, a religion or religion surrogate to live by and understand by, in about the same sense that he needs sunlight, calcium or love. (1968, p. 206)

According to Maslow (1971), meaning in life is a "meta-motive," "growth need," or "metaneed" that functions according to different rules than a "deficit-need." Although meta-motives require fulfilment for healthy functioning and produce illness when unfulfilled, they are different from deficit-needs in several ways. Metaneeds are not symptomatic of internal deficit because the tensions they create are often pleasurable, their gratification increases their motivational power, their satisfaction produces positive growth rather than merely averting illness, and they can not be fully satisfied. Applying these characteristics to meaning in life, pursuing one's meaning may be a pleasurable, growth-promoting activity that increases in intensity when the meaning begins to be fulfilled. Also, "completing" one's meaning or purpose in life is not possible because meaning in life is found in tasks or processes that cannot be perfected (e.g., truth, beauty).

To Maslow (1966, 1968, 1970, 1971), meaning in life involves personal choice, but the choice's value with respect to self-actualization is largely determined by internal conditions that are beyond the individual's control. In other words, individuals are free to choose meanings but they will be healthier if they choose meanings that help them to fulfil their inner nature. Thus, the

"best" meanings are those found within; meanings that are created are likely to be less appropriate. Maslow and Frankl agreed that some meanings are more "true" than others, but they posed different domains in which the criteria for truth are found. Both theorists agreed, however, that meaning in life is desirable.

Viewing Maslow's (1966, 1968, 1970, 1971) conception within a different context, it is clear that Maslow adopted a structural stance toward meaning in life. Individuals possess intrinsic values that can be fulfilled only through appropriate interactions with the environment. For the healthiest outcome, chosen activities "match" intrinsic values as closely as possible. Compare this view to Frankl's (1966) conception, which understands the process of making meaning to involve individuals conforming as closely as possible to meanings that exist in the world. The closer that individuals act according to "true" meanings, the healthier they become.

Maslow (1966, 1968, 1970, 1971) did not address how meaning in life develops throughout the life-span. To Maslow, meaning emerges as a concern after other developmental issues are addressed. When meaning emerges as a developmental task, it is dealt with by matching activities and experiences with inner characteristics. Maslow described how this matching process assisted

individuals to develop further, but he did not address how the meaning-making process changed with further development. It is here inferred that Maslow did not conceive the process of finding meaning to undergo significant change after its emergence.

Meaning as Consciously Created

Both Frankl (1966, 1969, 1984) and Maslow (1966, 1970) maintained that values and meanings are not arbitrary human creations. Both of their theories depend on the assumption that meaning possesses a reality independent of human consciousness. Although this assumption cannot be said to be incorrect, it is a difficult assumption to defend. In the next two sections, theories are reviewed that place the origins of meaning in the human mind, rather than in the world or within human biology. In this section Yalom's (1980) conceptions of atheistic existentialism, Blocker's (1974) analysis of meaning and Wilber's (1977, 1980, 1983) understanding of meaning are reviewed. Atheistic existentialists, Blocker and Wilber understand the world to be inherently meaningless. The difference between the positions is their understanding of the human emotional response to the world's meaninglessness. Existentialists have suffered considerable anxiety over the world's "absurdity," whereas Blocker celebrates the manner in which humans are able to project meaning onto the world. Wilber

understands the emotional response to be dependent on individual development. To Wilber, the world's meaninglessness is anxiety-producing at one developmental level but not at another.

Yalom (1980) has perhaps best summarized the conception of meaning in life as a conscious individual creation as held by atheistic existential thinkers (e.g., Camus, 1960; Sartre, 1956). The atheistic existential position holds that humans choose and create their circumstances. Meaning does not exist outside of the individual who creates it; there is not ultimate design of, or purpose to, the universe. Why, then, are atheistic existentialists concerned with the concept? In Yalom's words,

> The human being seems to require meaning. To live without meaning, goals, values, or ideals seems to provoke...considerable distress. In severe form it may lead to the decision to end one's life.... We apparently need absolutes--firm ideals to which we can aspire and guidelines by which to steer our lives. (p. 422)

Meaning in life is desirable, but needing meaning in a meaningless universe is problematic. To resolve this problem, two actions are required. First, individuals must create their own meanings. Meaning is not to be found in the world and thus, individuals who need meaning must accept

the responsibility of developing meaning. However, Yalom acknowledged that the anxiety or "angst" resulting from a lack of meaning is not always reduced when individuals remain conscious of the fact that their meanings are self-created. Consequently, the reduction of anxiety requires a second action: commitment. Individuals need to immerse themselves whole-heartedly in their chosen meanings and purposes if they wish to avoid the anxiety of nihilism. Full commitment to a cause or person reduces the nagging influence of remaining conscious that meaning is a personally created projection onto the world.

Atheistic existentialists generally do not address developmental aspects of meaning in life. Their concern has traditionally been directed toward adults. Mitchell (1975), however, observed that some adolescents are prone to temporarily adopting nihilism, the most extreme position of the atheistic existentialists. The nihilistic stance holds no hope for meaning, even as a viable human creation. To nihilists, everything is without purpose or significance. Mitchell noted that adolescents tend to adopt this worldview, if only temporarily, because their new-found intellectual powers allow them to examine and evaluate previously unexamined values, beliefs and morals. Unfortunately, "during this time of life, intelligence outraces emotion, leaving a gap which all humans, including

adolescents, experience as anxiety" (p. 189). Adolescents find themselves overwhelmed by their new abilities to question their purpose. Thus, their emerging intellectual capabilities serve to allow them to question meaning for the first time, but also serve to prevent them from fulfilling their needs for meaning. In order to minimize the anxiety caused by their relative valuelessness, adolescents conclude that everything is valueless and meaninglessness. This is a normal process according to Mitchell, provided that nihilism is only temporarily adopted. "Transitory nihilism serves as a sort of philosophical anesthetic which temporarily eases the pains of normal adolescence and, therefore, is viewed as a temporary reaction to the stress of adolescent existence" (p. 191).

Most adolescents emerge from nihilism by eventually finding personal meaning, according to Mitchell (1975). As emotion catches up with intellect, adolescents are able to satisfy their need for meaning by:

> (1) satisfying basic psychological needs...; (2) involving oneself in action <u>perceived</u> as important; (3) giving and receiving love; (4) engaging in work which contributes to the social good; and (5) engaging in action which corresponds to one's value system or which allows one to express in action what one believes. (p. 206)

Of primary importance is Mitchell's observation that "an individual may experience meaning without conscious awareness that what he has done contributes to satisfying the need for meaning" (p. 206). Thus, meaning is not invented; rather, the adolescent "discovers those behaviours and beliefs which, when interwoven with his own personal history, satisfy the pre-existing need for meaning" (p. 206). Mitchell conceived the nihilistic worldview as a false view that serves primarily as a defense against the anxiety of personal meaninglessness. The "true" view, for Mitchell, is a combination of Frankl's and Maslow's views: meaning is a human need satisfied by the process of discovery of creative, experiential and attitudinal values.

The atheistic existential view is not the only perspective from which to view an intrinsically meaningless universe. Blocker's (1974) conception of meaning, which borrows heavily from eastern systems of thought, understands meaning to be a human projection onto the world. However, unlike the existentialists, Blocker did not conceive the inherent meaninglessness of the world as an inherently anxiety producing problem. Blocker argued that individuals experience the angst of meaninglessness only because they have adopted cultural expectations that meaning is not a human projection. In other words, the void of meaning in the world becomes problematic when individuals expect the

universe to possess meaning. To Blocker, angst results from the disappointment experienced when this significant expectation is found to be false. Blocker argued that if individuals did not expect meaning in the world, the discovery that meaning is a human projection would not be disappointing and disillusioning. Rather, the understanding that meaning is a human projection is cause for celebrating the uniquely human achievements of creating symbolism, meaning and purpose.

Blocker (1974) pointed to eastern conceptions of meaning, particularly the conceptions of Buddhism, to illustrate that meaninglessness need not be cause for despair. Individuals in cultures that adopt eastern religious systems are raised to understand meaning to be maya or illusion. Rather than being encouraged to find meaning, individuals are encouraged to develop to the point where they can transcend meaning. Although meaning is understood to be a useful tool in these cultures, meaning is also seen to be developmentally restrictive when it prevents individuals from experiencing reality directly. Preoccupation with personal meaning prevents individuals from realizing their potential to transcend meaning and experience greater unity with reality. Meaning is not always desirable within this perspective. In Blocker's words:

> One need only contrast the 20th-century European response to nothingness with the joyous response of traditional Buddhism to see the gratuitousness--the absurdity--of the modern existentialist response. (p. 103)

Blocker (1974) did not address the development of meaning in individuals. He implied, however, that meaning-making is a process that becomes increasingly sophisticated with development. In the early stages of development, meaning is understood to be a feature of the world rather than as a personal creation. In later stages, individuals become sufficiently proficient at pursuing meaning that they are able to ponder the origins of meaning. It is at this point that individuals, upon discovering the projective nature of meaning, either take meaning for what it is or fall into despair. To Blocker, the reaction to ascertaining the true source of meaning is largely determined by cultural forces.

Another theorist influenced by eastern thought is Wilber (1977, 1980, 1983). In Wilber's system, creating meaning in life is a specific developmental task. To Wilber, the most important aspect of development is the movement of the self/not-self boundary. Wilber explained the movement of this boundary by claiming that consciousness is comprised of a multilevelled spectrum in which each level

is more encompassing than the previous level. One of Wilber's assumptions is that the universe is whole or undivided; human development consists primarily of the progressive realization of this unity. Movement along the spectrum of consciousness results in a continual expansion of the self/not-self boundary until the ultimate human motive, the desire to achieve unity with the universe, is satisfied.

The developmental process consists of the self identifying with emerging basic structures of consciousness (Wilber, 1980, 1983). Similar to Piaget's cognitive stages, the basic structures of consciousness emerge hierarchically and remain in existence. As the self identifies with each basic structure, it adopts characteristics specific to the available modes of thinking and perceiving. The movement of the self is motivated by the quest for Atman, or union with the universe. As each new basic structure emerges, the self releases its identification with its present structure and then transforms its identification in order to identify with the emergent structure. The self continues to establish identification with the new structure until it realizes that the operational mode of the structure is insufficient to reach Atman. For example, one basic structure uses formal operational thought as its primary mode of operation. The individual who utilizes this mode understands thought to be

the key to achieving Atman. However, the self eventually realizes that thought will not lead to unity and thus, it becomes ready to release its identification with the basic structure of consciousness.

Wilber (1977, 1980) viewed meaning in life in the existential and humanistic sense of a mission, calling or purpose. Unlike the existentialists and humanists however, Wilber maintained that the quest for meaning in life is a specific developmental task. Wilber argued that meaning in life is a particularly important issue to what he called existential or centauric individuals (equivalent to "self-actualizers" in Maslow's (1970) model). At the existential level, the self identifies with both body and mind and thus, the self/not-self boundary is placed squarely between the organism and the world. The existential individual must face "stark existence, shorn of all egoic ideas, objects of cognition, and intellectual crutches" (1977, p. 248). The issue of being versus non-being is the primary cause of anxiety at this level, and the predominant way of dealing with the issue is to choose being by finding meaning in life. Meaning in life is perceived at this level to be the key to achieving Atman. To Wilber, however, meaning in life is only a step towards Atman, a step that will eventually be replaced by a new mode of achieving unity.

Unlike other theories, Wilber's (1977, 1980) model

describes meaning in life as both desirable and undesirable. The value of possessing meaning depends on the individual's level of development. The possession of meaning in life prior to the existential level may lead the self to prematurely begin identification with a higher structure of consciousness. This identification would be unstable and subject to later disintegration. Also, the possession of meaning in life for too long a period during the existential level will prevent the self from releasing its identification with the existential structure of consciousness and this, in turn, will prevent subsequent development from occurring. Meaning in life is a stage-specific phenomenon that should neither be adopted prematurely nor clung to overextensively, in Wilber's view.

Meaning as Unconsciously and Consciously Created

The conceptions of meaning reviewed thus far in this chapter have their origins in humanistic, existential, or eastern schools of thought. Regardless of their points of disagreement, these perspectives agree that meaning-making or meaning-finding exemplify some of the "highest" and "best" functions of humanity. However, their emphasis on the "farthest reaches of human nature" has prevented these perspectives from specifically addressing the origins of meaning in developmental terms. Mitchell's (1975) and Wilber's (1977) examination of meaning are two of the few

developmental approaches within these perspectives. In this section, two stances are reviewed that approach meaning developmentally. Howard Stein (1983) developed a psychoanalytic perspective of meaning that, in simple terms, conceives meaning to often be a defense mechanism effected by unconscious processes. Robert Kegan (1984) developed a neo-Piagetian perspective that understands meaning-making to be the very context in which human development occurs.

Stein (1983) linked emotional/psychological views of meaning with the cognitive/linguistic conceptions of meaning by arguing that all meanings have affective components. To Stein, symbolism combines cognitive, affective and perceptual processes. Stein's view of meaning was borrowed from Whitehead (1959), who maintained that:

> the human mind is functioning symbolically when some components of its experience elicit consciousness, beliefs, emotions, and usages, respecting other components of its experience. The former set of components are the 'symbols,' and the latter set constitute the 'meaning' of the symbols. (pp. 7-8)

Thus, Stein viewed the making of meaning as an internal process of the psyche. However, he added to Whitehead's theory the idea that symbolism occurs through unconscious as well as conscious processes, such as when dreaming. This is an important addition because Stein argued that symbolism is

often used as an anxiety-reducing defense.

When symbolism is not used for defensive purposes, it is used to represent and make sense of reality. This use of symbolism is an adaptive form of reality testing. Stein (1983) agreed with La Barre (1962), who maintained that

> man is like an existentialist spider who spreads out a moral net of symbolism over the void out of his own substance--and then walks upon it. But the final safety of the net depends always on that integrity and the soundness of the postulated points of reference to a real physical world. (p. 67)

Symbols represent reality, and they can do so more or less accurately. Stein argued that humans have a vested interest in not symbolizing reality adequately, and thus unconscious forces act to create rigid and distorted symbolic representations. Stein argued that "the greatest impediment to human adaptation and evolution is the human proclivity to confuse realms [unconscious fantasy and reality], to be unconsciously motivated to blur the distinction between the internal and external environment" (p. 395). The confusion of realms results in individuals experiencing meaning as if it was an attribute of reality, rather than experiencing meaning as a process of attribution. Attributing meaning to the world allows individuals to project and thus avoid sources of anxiety. In Stein's words, "the symbol is

thereby split off from its source so that the representation does not re-present to the person what he is afraid to face" (p. 397). For example, Stein understood theology to be a massive projection of meaning onto the world. The use of meaning in defensive ways is maladaptive, according to Stein.

Stein (1983) argued that:

> we tend to think of meaning as a solution to life's problems rather than <u>being the problem itself</u>.... We act as though one [meaning] system <u>must</u> possess superior value to another, and that therefore, we must choose. Perhaps <u>not to choose at all</u> is preferable. (p. 410)

Without relying on systems of meaning, humans could discover what they actually are and behave on the basis of this discovery. To Stein, individuals who clear away stagnating meanings, find their inner core, and behave according to their natural inclinations will be able to use symbols and meanings as convenient tools. Meanings that are used as tools rather than as defenses are flexible and adaptive, and they can be seen most prominently in the world of art.

To Stein (1983), the development of meaning begins in early childhood. The rigidity of adult meanings have their origins in early trauma. Although children are capable of using symbolism in flexible ways, they are often placed in

positions (usually by parents) wherein symbols are used to help repress undesirable conflicts and fantasies. Stein pointed out that

> the safety conferred by the symbol...is both temporary and illusory, for now the symbol must constantly be reaffirmed through ritualization that shores it up to prevent the imminent danger from resurfacing. (p. 402)

Consequently, the initial use of symbolization for defensive purposes rapidly leads to a proliferation of defensive symbol systems.

The early use of symbolization for defensive purposes, combined with children's fledgling abilities to differentiate self from other, results in a conceptual distortion whereby children confuse symbols with reality. This distortion gains strength with development unless an intervention procedure such as psychoanalysis is used to help the individual differentiate between symbols and the reality they represent. This differentiation occurs only rarely, according to Stein (1983) (presumably because of the limited availability of psychoanalysis).

Although Stein's (1983) approach to meaning is developmental, it is only marginally so. In his conception, meaning is generally used as a defense against developmental trauma. If trauma was not to occur, meaning would be utilized as an adaptive tool. Stein's conception of meaning

does not include an account of the various forms that adaptive or maladaptive meanings manifest throughout development. Robert Kegan's (1984) "constructive developmental" position is more explicit in this regard. Kegan understood the individual evolution of meaning to be the very ground of development. Rather than understanding meaning as an outcome of development, Kegan viewed development and meaning-making as mutually interactive processes. For Kegan, every developmental event is an event in meaning-making.

Kegan's (1984) theory is based on Piaget's genetic epistemology. Following Piaget, Kegan conceived development to be the process in which the organism and environment continually reorganize their relationship through the resolution of states of disequilibrium. Each period in which a disequilibrative state is being resolved marks a developmental stage that is qualitatively different from the previous stage. It is qualitatively different because "in the process of development, disequilibrium is resolved, not by restoring the boundary of the old truce [between self and environment], but by reconstructing the very relationship and establishing a new, more adequate truce" (Kegan, Noam & Rogers, 1982, p. 106). At each level of development, the self is different because the boundary that separates it from the environment has changed (cf. Wilber, 1977). Kegan

et al.'s concept of self

> refers both to the organizing principle in experience (the subject) and to the contents of experience (the objects). This subject-object relationship can be thought of as the underlying psychologic of a wide range of apparently regular cognitive and affective phenomena occurring through development. (p. 107)

Each level of development is characterized by particular interpersonal (self-other) and intrapsychic (subject-object) relationships. As these relationships change, so does the individual's mode of meaning-making change. Moreover, meaning-making is also the process by which self/environment "truces" are formed. Unlike Piaget, however, Kegan conceived meaning-making to be much more than a cognitive process. Kegan understood meaning-making in the same way that Erikson conceived ego development: that is, the individual's "capacity to unify his experience and his action in an adaptive manner" (Erikson, 1963, p. 15). Thus, meaning-making is a cognitive, affective, physical and perceptual process, in Kegan's view.

Kegan (1984) understood meaning in a dialectical fashion. Meaning-making is the process by which developmental change occurs, and it is also an activity that is changed by development. Failure to make sense of the environment results in disequilibrium, attempts to restore

equilibrium result in a new self/environment boundary, and the establishment of a different self/environment "truce" allows the individual to make meaning in new ways.

Discussion

Each theory reviewed in this chapter possesses intellectual merit, yet each is open to considerable criticism. Since this entire work is devoted to critically analyzing conceptions of meaning, this chapter does not include a discussion of the relative advantages and disadvantages of each theory. Rather, the discussion now moves to placing these theories in an historical context, addressed in Chapter III. A greater understanding of current theories of meaning is achieved by placing "meaning in life" in an historical perspective. Theories of meaning in life are an historically recent phenomenon (e.g., all of the theories reviewed in this chapter were developed in this century) and yet, it is expected that such an important human concern has been pondered throughout the ages. By examining how concepts of meaning have evolved, we may be provided with a more solid footing from which to critique current theories.

CHAPTER III

CULTURAL SEMIOGENESIS -- AN HISTORICAL EXAMINATION OF MEANING IN LIFE

Twentieth century literature, philosophy and psychology reflect considerable concern with the purpose and meaning of human existence. As described in the previous chapter, existential philosophy maintains that the problem of meaning in life is an inherent fact of existence that arises by virtue of human abilities.

During the last fifty years, in excess of one hundred empirical studies and theoretical works have been published that examine the nature of meaning and meaninglessness in life, the effects of having or not having meaning in life, and the ways in which therapists may facilitate clients' quests for meaning. Research of this scope indicates an interest that is not merely spurious. It is curious, however, that the proliferation of writing on the subject has occurred in this century. As will be shown throughout this chapter, meaning in life has not always been a human concern, and it has taken different forms when it has been a human concern -- an intriguing state of affairs with regard to a given of existence.

Meaning in life is a metaphysical topic that has developed through the ages, taking on different forms, using

different modes of consciousness and resulting in different outcomes with each successive development. The intent of this chapter is to outline the ways in which humans have dealt with meaning in existence. This is a study of cultural semiogenesis, to use Fujita's (1987) term, or the study of the cultural development of meaning. The analysis will show that "purpose" or "meaning" have undergone significant changes throughout history. The meaning of "meaning" has changed, moving from a reflection of general coherence of the universe, to a God-given general purpose, to the purpose of natural law and, finally, to the realization that meaning is a uniquely human projection which reflects our psychology rather than some grand design. The tools with which we understand and create meaning have also changed. Magic, myth, theology, metaphysics, science, existentialism and esoteric religion reflect methods used to grapple with the meaning of human existence.

Achieving a high degree of specificity or conclusiveness regarding semiogenesis is not possible. Writings on meaning in life are rare prior to the nineteenth century (Blocker, 1974), consequently much of the following analysis consists of theoretical deductions based upon evidence of ritualistic, religious, philosophical, social and scientific changes throughout history. The evidence, quite obviously, is open to various interpretations.

It could be argued that the speculative nature of this examination results in a perspective that is so uncertain as to be rendered useless. However, the point is not to prove various points about the history of meaning in life; rather, the intent is to clear the way for a broader perspective on current theories of meaning in life. A parallel to this exercise is Kuhn's (1970) analysis of paradigmatic shifts in science. Although Kuhn's work is considerably more systematic and comprehensive than the present analysis, the intent is similar.

My interpretations of cultural evidence are constrained by the assumption that ontogeny parallels phylogeny in general and significant ways. This restraint is debatable for several reasons. However, the most important issue is that this view results in a circular approach to semiogenesis -- the analysis alternates from using knowledge of individual development to explain cultural development, to using cultural evidence to support claims about individual development. The evidence is thus supportive rather than conclusive. This approach serves to guide analyses of a vast amount of data that might otherwise be overwhelming in their complexity.

An axiological concern is of significance to this discussion: How can the value of cultural changes be assessed? It is debatable whether historical changes

represent improvements to the human condition. Similarly, there is no a priori reason to assume that later individual developmental stages are more valuable than earlier stages. For the present purposes, it is assumed that each historical shift reflects a contribution to culture that is more than a mere addition of an attribute. Each cultural shift represents a new gestalt or configuration that is different from the previous gestalt and that encompasses the previous configuration. Each cultural development possesses gains over previous developments but does not, theoretically, replace the gains of previous developments (however, certain previous modes may seem to be ignored in an examination of human practices). Further, it is assumed that each of these gains contributes to the ability of humans to be truly human and to utilize the potentials of the human species. In this sense, cultural shifts can be understood to be positive and valuable in their potential, even though they appear undesirable in practice. For example, the scientific revolution may appear undesirable to those who perceive it as the stimulus for humans' disassociation with God; however, it can be perceived as an advance that will eventually allow for a more authentic spiritual existence due to its destruction of misleading theological dogma.

The development of meaning is closely tied to the development of consciousness. Increased consciousness

indicates increased awareness which, in turn, allows for increased human choice. The analysis below suggests that humans are becoming increasingly teleonomic or self-directed, or, conversely, that humans are becoming decreasingly reactive, or merely responding to environmental stimuli. Humanity's capacity for destruction requires, for the planet's sake, more than mere automatic responses to uncontrolled stimuli. With increasing consciousness and, as we will see, with the increasing realization that all meanings are ones that have been humanly created, we are in the increasingly advantageous position of choosing how we want our future to unfold.

Three final qualifiers: First, only the history of Western Civilization is included in the present analysis (the reason for this restriction is nothing more than personal ignorance of other civilizations). Second, the periods of semiogenesis to be described in the following pages are delineated primarily by significant shifts in culture rather than by specific time frames. Although not entirely arbitrary, another investigator examining the same information may have chosen different cultural shifts to mark semiogenetic periods. Third, many more culturally significant events have been excluded than have been included. The present analysis is intended to be merely a sketch of semiogenesis.

Phases in Semiogenesis

Ten phases of semiogenesis are described in the following pages. The descriptors for these phases use a formidable amount of novel terminology, and thus a chart is provided below that lists the phases (Table 1). The table is given to assist the reader to place in perspective the various phases and their time periods.

Phase I: Fused Interrelationship

Before *Homo sapiens* had evolved from *Homo erectus*, they lived a day-to-day existence based on hunting and gathering

Table I

Phases of Semiogenesis

Phases		Approximate Time Period
I.	Fused Interrelationship	More than 200,000 years ago
II.	Magical Coherence	200,000 to 10,000 years ago
III.	Mythical Coherence	10,000 to 2,500 years ago
IV.	Theological Purposive	500 B.C. to 1,200 A.D.
V.	Theo-Metaphysical Purposive	1,200 A.D. to 1,500 A.D.
VI.	Metaphysical Purposive	1,500 A.D. to 1,650 A.D.
VII.	Natural Purposive	1,650 A.D. to 1,850 A.D.
VIII.	Anxious Meaninglessness	1,850 A.D. to 1,950 A.D.
IX.	Pragmatic Meaning	1,950 A.D. to 2,100 A.D.
X.	Joyful Meaning	2,100 A.D. and beyond

(more than 200,000 years ago) (Garfinkle, 1981). Language had not developed much beyond monosyllabic calls, fire was just beginning to be used for cooking, the process of farming had not yet begun, human groups were very small and, most importantly, it can be argued that homo erectus did not conceive itself as separate from it environment (Neumann, 1973; Wilber, 1981). Humans' relationship with their environment was characterized by fused interrelationship: that is, the inability to clearly perceive distinctions between self and not-self. According to Wilber, this period is pre-personal, sub-conscious, pre-temporal and largely instinct-based. Neumann (1973), the Jungian investigator of the evolution of consciousness, labelled this period uroboric, after the symbol of a serpent consuming its own tail. The expression "man-ape" derives from the evidence that homo erectus were closer to higher primates in thought and action than they were to present day homo sapiens. Behaviour was largely reactive and in all likelihood followed principles of classical and operant conditioning, in which the reinforcers and punishers were related to the satisfaction of physiological, security and social needs.

Humans were bound to, and interrelated with, their environment. They did not ask the "why" of existence (this does not occur until much later) because they were only

minimally conscious of their own behaviour. Neither were they concerned with time and the finitude of their existence, two factors vital to the origins of purpose. The experience of meaning is simply not an issue during this stage of evolution.

The reader may inquire why this period is described at all, given its lack of relationship to the problem at hand. However, the very omission of meaning makes this period interesting. Contrary to the position of existential philosophers, meaning has not always been a human concern.

Phase II: Magical Coherence

The magical coherence period corresponds temporally with Garfinkle's (1981) mesoanthropine, neoanthropine, and initial holoanthropine grades of human consciousness (from 200,000 to about 10,000 years ago). Significant developments resulted in important shifts in human practice. Increased control of fire, technological improvements in weaponry, refined language abilities and larger social groups all contributed to more stable social structures. For example, Garfinkle noted that this period marks the origins of burial practices, a prominent human achievement. He also pointed out that humans endowed both human and non-human "objects and forces...with animate properties, protean strengths, malevolent injuring propensities, and talismanic protecting powers, or credited with possession by a dybbuk

(an indwelling spirit taking possession of an individual or natural object)" (pp. 213-214). That is, this period marks the beginning of magic which, to Wilber (1981), indicates the embryonic ability of humans to differentiate themselves from their environment. Humans here remain largely embedded in environmental events but are initiating the process of making sense of surrounding stimuli. No longer merely reacting to immediate stimuli, the magical peoples originate prediction by attributing powers and motives to physical occurrences. Wilber called this period typhonic, after the half man/half serpent symbol of the typhon. To Wilber, the typhon represents a differentiation of body from environment while still indicating the fused or undifferentiated nature of mind from body.

Mind is not yet differentiated from body and thus, thought is primitive, bodily-based and alogical. Addressing the nature of thought of young children in the early stages of differentiating mind from body, theorists have created various labels that suit this type of thinking. Freud termed this type of thought "primary process," Piaget labelled it "preoperational cognition," Sullivan called it the "parataxic mode" and Arieti represented it as "phantasmic" (Wilber, 1981). Because mind is strongly tied to body and internal experience is not well differentiated from external experience, thinking in this phase confuses

parts with the whole, the whole with the parts, internal images with external events, and external events with internal images. The primary process thinker perceives the external world as animated, and the egocentricity of this level tends to result in the perception that environmental events are specifically motivated to influence the individual's life. Combining these perceptions with the tendency to conceive everything as interconnected, we can easily see the origins of magic. Just as a small child may believe that the sun deliberately follows him or her, so the undifferentiated typhonic individual may perceive environmental objects and events to be animated (Wilber, 1981). Their ability to confuse the part with the whole and the symbol with the symbolized allows typhonic individuals to find ways of influencing the environment in their favour. For example, Wilber cited Mickunas' description of magical hunting procedures:

> A man...draws the animal in the sand before dawn, and when the first sun-ray touches the drawing, he shoots an arrow into the drawing, thus killing the animal; 'later' he slays the animal, and performs a ritual dance at evening. All these actions and events are <u>one</u>--identical, not symbolical. (p. 46)

With respect to meaning, it can be seen that <u>everything</u> is rendered meaningful in the <u>magical coherence</u> phase. The

individual understands all events to be interrelated, purposeful, intentional and motivated; nothing is left unexplained, unordered or unanswered. Events do not "just happen" during this phase because all events potentially possess significance and meaningful causes. Blocker (1974) speculated that this phase of semiogenesis may be the most meaningful of humanity's existence. He claimed "that the world of the pre-Socratic Greek was a more meaningful (i.e., more coherent [italics added]) world than the metaphysical world of Aristotle and St. Thomas which was itself a far more meaningful world than the scientific materialism of the 19th century" (p. 46). In a thorough review of the various meanings of "meaning" and "meaninglessness," Blocker described one of the most basic forms of meaning as a sense of coherence. A coherent world-view is one in which all events are related to all others: that is, the world-view of the magical coherence phase. Blocker claimed that "in the sense that they include in a tightly knit system of thought a broader spectrum of human responses and relationships to the world--emotional, volitional and perceptual, as well as cognitive," (p. 47) individuals in the magical coherence phase display a greater rationality than do individuals in later metaphysical phases. Although greater rationality need not be attributed to this perspective, there is little doubt that it is a cohesive

outlook. It is an outlook that enhances the individual's emotional connectedness with the environment and, as Blocker argued, it is therefore less alienating or detaching than later semiogenetic phases.

Later semiogenetic perspectives have mocked the magical "primitives" for projecting their wishes, desires and motives on to the external world. One reason the world is coherent for magical individuals is that they have no inkling that the meaningfulness which they see as inherent is actually a projection. They do not understand that the world is not "out to get them" or is not consciously protecting them. However, as will become clear later, subsequent semiogenetic phases also consist of humanly created projections of meaning onto the world's activities and thus, mocking the primitive mentality indicates a somewhat unfounded sense of superiority.

In certain ways, however, the magical coherent meaning creations are inferior to later developments because their origins are primarily unconscious. That is, although the typhonic mind (in which mind and body is undifferentiated) is conscious of the outcomes of its meaning creations (e.g., poking a voodoo doll causes pain to the person it represents), it has little control over the source of the meaning creations (which is another way of saying that it is not aware that it is projecting meaning on to the world).

The individual does not consciously attribute meanings to events, nor does he or she question these meanings; this occurs automatically at a subconscious level. The meanings are thus not open to examination or conscious modification.

Phase III: Mythical Coherence

Although tremendous changes occurred in the roughly 175,000 year period reviewed above, the changes of greatest significance with respect to meaning are the emergence of farming and the increased capacity for language. Farming began about 12,000 to 10,000 years ago, concurrent with numerous qualitative shifts in human consciousness (e.g., Wilber, 1981). Wilber maintained that with the advent of farming came changes in time perception, impulse control and transmission of cultural patterns. Advanced language skills are central to these changes because language allows for the manipulation of that which is not present. Language enables humans to hold off impulses and plan for the future because it provides a way of conceptually dealing with the future. This tool was not as refined for magical coherence individuals and thus, they were more tightly bound to a day to day existence. The mythical coherence person, on the other hand, could use language to facilitate memory for past events and to improve prediction of tomorrow's conditions. Language, then, allows for the possibility of farming. Seasons can be predicted, vegetative growth patterns can be

understood, and communication between group members allows for considerably more cooperation than was previously possible (Jaynes, 1976; Wilber, 1981).

According to Jaynes (1976), there is some contention regarding the claim that full-fledged language appeared so recently in history. However, in Jaynes' view, language must have undergone vast improvements roughly 12,000 years ago because archaeological evidence points to dramatic changes in culture that can be best explained by language development. For example, the Natufian culture consisted of hunters living in caves in 10,000 B.C..

> By 9,000 B.C., they are burying their dead in ceremonial graves and adopting a more settled life. The latter is indicated by the first signs of structural building, such as the paving and walling of platforms with much plaster, and cemeteries sometimes large enough for eighty-seven burials, a size unknown in any previous age. (p. 139)

The ability to farm was also dependent on language, in Jaynes' view -- "It is only language, I think, that can keep him at this time-consuming all-afternoon work. A Middle Pleistocene [magical coherence] man would forget what he was doing" (p. 134). We need not agree with Jaynes' argument that language assisted by taking the form of hallucinated voices to understand the significance of language in

transforming culture.

Wilber (1981) pointed out that "with language, the verbal mind could differentiate itself out of the previous bodyself, it could rise above the prison of the immediate and conceive and sustain long-range goals and tasks" (p. 93). In Wilber's view, it is the beginning of the differentiation of mind and body which marks the initial stages of the mythical coherence, or, to use his label, the "mythic-membership" phase. The differentiation of mind and body with its concomitant extension of time also makes mortality more salient to the mythical coherence mind. Death can be foreseen and it can be pondered; both activities increase anxiety. Whereas the fear of death was very fleeting in the fused interrelationship phase and only dimly prominent in the magical coherence phase, in the mythical coherence phase it becomes highly significant, according to Wilber. This heightened perception of vulnerability requires defensive procedures and thus, we are not surprised to find that this time period marks the origins of gods and elaborate funeral ceremonies (Jaynes, 1976).

An analysis of how and why gods came into being during this period is beyond the scope of this paper. The concerns here are that gods did become prominent, that appeasing the gods resulted in punishment and death, and that ceremonial

rituals and sacrifices became common in the mythical coherence phase. Wilber's (1981) summarized the motivation for these events:

> The ritual, in short, was an ingenuous....way to magically buy off death and a way to make the practitioner of ritual appear 'in charge of' the elements of nature, in charge of rain, of fertility, of life itself--in charge of the Great Mother, of Mother Nature--omnipotent, cosmocentric, deified. (p. 128)

The mythical coherence society maintains the tendency to animate natural events established in the magical coherence phase. However, it begins to use gods as symbols of the forces of nature, rather than merely attributing motivation to nature's events themselves. Myths are established to make sense of the god's motives, wishes, desires and actions, to help predict the god's actions and to assist in determining what practices should be followed to appease the gods. Wilber (1981) pointed out that as this period progresses, the mythical rituals become increasingly symbolic -- whereas early in this phase, individuals needed to be sacrificed to please the gods, later in the phase substitute sacrifices are made to demonstrate to the gods one's good intentions. By about 500 B.C., just prior to Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the myths are very elaborate and are quite abstract.

The mythical world-view retains the strong coherence of the magical coherence perspective. However, the use of myth rather than magic adds a new dimension to this coherence. Although humanity is still attributing meaning to sources outside of itself at this stage, it is beginning to partially personalize the source of meaning rather than animating non-human beings. Gods generally have human qualities (e.g., the Great Mother, Zeus) or, minimally, they possess animal qualities (e.g., the Serpent Lord). In their differentiation of mind and body, humans are beginning to understand that it is only life-forms that have motives and intentions. They have yet to understand, however, that only humans create meaning. The universe remains intrinsically meaningful for the mythical coherence society, and it is the gods who understand, control and convey that meaning. It is generally assumed that humans possess a need for security, stability, or predictability which, without a rigorous science, is satisfied by the perception that mythical superhuman beings control the events of the universe. Strong myths that possess gods who give clear directives for behaviour prevent individuals from facing the harsh reality that they are their own guides. The mental self that is emerging from the mind/body differentiation could probably not tolerate the anxiety engendered by the realization of the ephemeral nature of its existence. The responsibility

associated with choosing one's existence and one's meanings would result in a regressive catastrophe for the fledgling self. Myths serve to stay this anxiety and thus, allow for the embryonic self to stabilize its development.

Phase IV: Theological Purposive

The Greek philosophers initiated a change in meaning-making that continued to develop until shortly after the birth of Christ. After Christ, the theological purposive phase reaches a plateau with respect to meaning that lasts until about 1200 A.D.. Although remaining embedded in a mythological consciousness, philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle began to rationally question the processes of nature and delve into the notion of being itself (Russell, 1984). A more clear and refined ontological distinction was made that separated body, mind and spirit. Also, these philosophers articulated monotheism, which began a trend to conceive of a god rather than the gods. But most importantly, the theological purposive phase marks the beginning of humanity's queries about the purpose of existence. The full differentiation between mind and body prodded the dissatisfaction with mythological reasons for human purpose. Humans were now in a position to question the origins of purpose.

The ability to question purpose did not immediately result in the acceptance of the view that inanimate objects

and events are purposeless. This idea, proposed by Democritus and the Atomists, was rejected by others, particularly Aristotle (Russell, 1984). Aristotle attributed purpose or "final cause" to moving bodies as well as to human creations. Plato and Aristotle conceived the universe itself to possess intrinsic purpose; purpose given by the First Cause, God. Individual human purpose and meaning were part of God's purpose, as well. For example, consider Socrates' last words:

> Men of Athens, I honour and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy....For know that this is the command of God. (Russell, 1984, p. 105)

Socrates' thoughts indicate a powerful sense of personal meaning and purpose; so powerful that he was willing to die for their fulfilment. However, the purpose is not Socrates' alone: God is the final decision-maker.

God-given meanings held sway on Western thought for roughly 1,500 years after Socrates' death. The most significant change within the <u>theological purposive</u> phase was the introduction of Christianity. It might be expected that the onset of a major world religion would cause vast changes in the way humans experienced meaning; however, this is not the case. The Christians perceived personal meaning

much the way Socrates did -- meaning was a God-given directive for behaviour. What changed for the Christians was the more detailed specification of the expected after-life if God's meanings were fulfilled, as well as a stronger sense of the punishments to be accrued if the meanings were ignored or abused.

Christianity did not radically change humanity's perception of meaning, even though it held the potential to uproot humanity's rather blind obedience to the laws and tenets of Judaism. Part of Christ's message was to abandon unthinking conformity and to experience spirituality for one's self. However, the message "I am the way, the truth and the life" was taken as an indication that Christ was merely a new form of God whose rules must be followed, rather than as a beckoning to follow Christ's example. The potential existed for people to discover their own meanings, purposes and spirituality, but the time was not right. For centuries afterwards, individuals understood universal coherence to be under God's control and personal meaning to be given by God.

Catholicism's hold on Christianity did very little to alter this perception of meaning. One change was to uphold the Pope as the mediator between God and His people. The Pope communicated and interpreted God's wishes, and became the visible relay of God's directions for human meaning.

In its early forms, monotheism provided a single external source from which to determine meaning. The concept of an intrinsically meaningless universe could not emerge until a differentiation began between the authority of the church and the legitimacy of independent inquiry into knowledge. This separation has its origins in the next, theo-metaphysical purposiveness, phase.

Phase V: Theo-Metaphysical Purposive

Around 1200 A.D., "the double-truth perspective of Ibn Rushd found its counterpart in Christian Europe" (Garfinkle, 1987, p. 1). The double-truth perspective distinguished two forms of truth: (a) the truth of science and philosophy, based on reason, and (b) the truth of religion and theology, based on revelation. At this stage, truth established through reason remained under pressure to not contradict the truth of theology. However, it formed the basis of an inquiry that was independent of theology.

The authority of the Church was further undermined by the increasing number of monarch-controlled universities in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Garfinkle, 1987). According to Garfinkle, by the fifteenth century the city states exerted a strong influence on university education and thus, three important powers were directing the quest for truth.

These developments began the progressive removal of the

Church's authority over debateable truth. However, neither of these movements were to separate from theology entirely: both the monarchy and the city states did not contradict theological dogma (e.g., the age of the earth). However, rather than merely accepting God's design of the universe as given, the scientists and philosophers of this phase began to probe the underlying workings of this design.

The theo-metaphysical purposive phase remains in acceptance of God's directives for behaviour. The combination of metaphysics with theology, however, changed this acceptance from one that was reactive to one that was conscious and enactive (Garfinkle, 1987). Consequently, individuals could begin to question their meanings and purposes even though the inquiry was constrained within theological bounds. The subordination of metaphysics to theology remains until the next semiogenetic phase.

Phase VI: Metaphysical Purposive

The Sixteenth Century saw a drastic weakening of the Church's stronghold on truth (Garfinkle, 1977). A summary of Garfinkle's description of these changes follows. The developments of the previous two centuries resulted in an intellectual community that was strong enough to establish the authority of natural law and reason over theological authority. This shift began primarily with recourse to reason, but by the sixteenth century, empiricism gained

strength as a means to acquiring reliable knowledge. By 1650, experimentation was added to the methodology of science and philosophy. It was this phase of rapid epistemological development that witnessed the introduction of Copernican astronomy, Descartes' rationalism, Bacon's empiricism and Kepler's laws of motion. Galileo's challenge to the Church highlights the struggle in this period. Galileo supported Copernican astronomy on rational and empirical grounds. The Church fought against the Copernican view because it contradicted scripture, and, although Galileo recanted, the altercation was one from which the Church would not completely recover.

The Church's authority with regard to theology was also under attack during this phase (Gay & Webb, 1973). The Lutheran, Swiss and English reformations weakened the claim that the Pope was the principle authority with respect to revelation. The Protestant revolution called for each person to experience personal revelation and to personally search the truth. By 1650 (the beginning of the next phase), these movements were sufficiently strong to result in many Christian churches, rather than solely the Church of Rome.

These developments away from the authority of the Church resulted in a shift in meaning formation. The metaphysical purposive phase marks the beginnings of a truly

independent inquiry into the workings of the universe at two ontological levels. Metaphysics and theology were now open to inquiry from non-theologians, and they were beginning to be open to any type of inquiry. Thinkers began to question theological dogma as an adequate source of knowledge regarding natural events (e.g., the age of the earth, planetary motion). They also began to question other tenets of Christian theology. I say "began" because the Reformation, although it resulted in significant changes to theology, did not question the basis of theology. For example, Protestants as well as Catholics remained bound to scriptures, to the notion of an ontologically separate God, and to the concept of a universe controlled by a Supreme Being. These ideas remained entrenched within the academic and theological communities throughout the Reformation -- it would take further intellectual development to question in a coherent and rigorous manner these core concepts.

I call this phase <u>metaphysical purposive</u> because it is characterized by rational, empirical and experimental inquiries that remain tied to a teleological notion of the universe. Our relationship with God changed during this time, but our view of God did not. Consequently, the freedom available to individuals to create and pursue their own meanings increased; however, their pursuits were constrained by the fundamental notion that the universe (and

its inhabitants) possessed inherent meaning and purposive God-given direction. Individuals remained bound to the belief that meaning possessed an independent reality.

Phase VII: Natural Purposive

The most salient marker of the beginning of the natural purposive phase, which extends from about 1650 to about 1850, is Isaac Newton's physics. It is the perceived power over nature that Newton's science bestows upon humanity that eventually results in the decline of the concept of a purposeful universe. However, in the natural purposive phase it is the locus of purpose that changes. Newton's success (as well as Descartes' earlier influence) made it possible to conceive the natural order of the universe and to focus less on its God-driven nature. Newton maintained the need for God in his theoretical system and Spinoza's pantheism attempted to equate God with nature; however, in each case the possibility existed to emphasize nature rather than God. After Newton, scientists rarely sought God's laws; rather, they sought the laws of nature. However, few abandoned God as the "prime-mover."

The transition from a God-controlled nature to a self-sufficient nature did not occur immediately after Newton, and neither did it result in the abandonment of a teleological view of the universe. Psychologically, people seemed unable or unwilling to believe that the world

possessed no intrinsic purpose. The physical world was understood to be set in motion by God and thus, it was also seen to possess inherent meaning.

It was after the thorough groundwork in explicating the functioning of the physical world by thinkers such as Newton, Leibniz, Boyle, Boerhaave and Lyell, that Darwin's theory of evolution caused a decisive shift in humanity's meaning-making. Darwin's inclusion of humans into the natural order dealt a severe blow to Christianity's doctrinal explanations of the universe. After Darwin, humans are no longer separate from nature; they are, in every sense, ontologically closer to apes than to God. After Darwin, humans are a part of the natural process. Their behaviour follows discernable laws, their origins are discoverable and their future is temporal rather than infinite. No longer the children of God, post-Darwin humans envision the possibility that their functioning and their future are not special in any genuine theological sense.

The natural purposive phase sets the stage for a meaningless universe. However, this understanding awaits the next semiogenetic phase. Natural purposive individuals quest for underlying order, coherence and direction which, although not God-given, is at least given by natural processes.

Phase VIII: Anxious Meaninglessness

The parallel realizations that the universe does not inherently possess meaning and that meaning is a human projection onto the world have been gradually taking hold from about 1850 to the present. In my view, two intellectual events are primarily responsible for this evolution: existential philosophy and modern physics. Existential philosophy brought the questions of meaning and meaningless into the forefront of consciousness, and modern physics highlighted the lack of separation between humanity and nature.

According the May (1977), the early nineteenth century saw the use of reason, which was enormously useful to science, being carried over to cultural practice. In May's words,

> The nineteenth century is broadly characterized by a separation of "reason" and "emotions", with voluntaristic effort (will) enthroned as the method of casting the decision between the two--which resulted generally in a denial of the emotions. (p. 29)

The indiscriminant application of reason and the concurrent neglect of human emotion in science, philosophy and culture became so extreme toward the end of the natural purposive phase that a conceptual backlash was inevitable. The first significant voice within this countertrend was Soren

Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard, perhaps the most influential of the early existentialists, called for a philosophy that did not separate the philosopher from the philosophized. Kierkegaard and the existentialists who followed him (e.g., Sartre, Nietzsche, Heidegger) did not believe that philosophy could progress if it maintained the notion that humans are only detached observers of worldly events. To Kierkegaard, the abstractions generated from pure reason distort reality; true understanding of the world requires inclusion of human subjectivity. Later existentialists strongly emphasized that the attempt to describe the world solely through reason is merely a cloak that gives humans the security of fitting into a reasonable scheme while hiding the unreasonableness of the universe. Camus, a twentieth century existentialist, pointed out that

> a world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger....This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly called the feeling of absurdity. (as cited in Blocker, 1974, p. 21).

It is absurdity, meaninglessness and meaning that the existentialists of the twentieth century are concerned with. Blocker's (1974) summary of the various forms of

meaninglessness described in this century is worth reading in its entirety:

> Meaninglessness, in its modern sense, can mean any of the following, or any combination thereof: being disconnected or uprooted; being impotent, or not in control of events; the moral or evaluative levelling of everything; the insignificance or alienation of man in a vast, nonhuman universe; the contingency of man; the hollowness or emptiness of life; the lack of a reason for living or a purpose to life; the failure of the world to answer to man's rationality; the fact that everything adds up to nothing, or very little; the pointlessness of life; loss of identity; the dog-eat-dog quality of life; the power of death to negate everything; the falseness, inauthenticity of one's life; indifference to others; a morally debased quality in things; having lost one's bearings and so on. (p. 18)

Each of the above forms of meaninglessness is accompanied by a negative emotional tone. I called this phase <u>anxious meaninglessness</u> because the existentialists realized that the universe possesses no intrinsic meaning, and they despaired at this realization. Throughout human history the world was understood to possess meaning. Consequently, the belief that meaning is a human projection

was taken to be a discovery that meaning is arbitrary, pointless and absurd. The existentialists took the human projection of meaning onto the world as a great absurd joke that humanity played on itself. Seeing this joke for what it is was believed to lead to "angst," or existential anxiety -- the experience of dread when faced with a meaningless world.

Relativity theory and quantum physics, both originating in the early 1900s, each helped, in their own way, to solidify the existentialists' claims. Existentialists argued that humans could not detach themselves from the natural world, but modern physics demonstrated that the observer, by merely observing, affects what is observed. This was a particularly powerful substantiation for the existentialists' views because it came from what society considered to be the most pure and most precise of the sciences. For almost 300 years, physics displayed the power of reason and detached observation in discovering and explaining nature's laws. Methodologically, Newtonian physics was also the paradigm science that other sciences attempted to emulate. No discipline was in a more esteemed position to aid the existentialists.

Existential psychology eventually incorporated many of the tenets of existential philosophy. Existential therapists saw as their task helping clients confront

meaninglessness, isolation, death and freedom (Yalom, 1980). Clients were to develop the courage to face nothingness head-on, no matter how painful, and to choose being, no matter how difficult. Authenticity was to be achieved by fully experiencing the despair of a meaningless world and by making the best of it by creating meaning. The existentialists realized that human choices are constrained by biology, social and physical environmental circumstances and history, but they emphasized the importance of conscious/affective choice. These therapies are fully teleonomic, rather than teleologic, in that they understand that purpose is chosen. The next semiogenetic phase will see the same emphasis on choice and responsibility, but without the accompanying emotional tone of despair and anxiety.

Phase IX: Pragmatic Meaning

This, the pragmatic meaning phase, and the next, the projected meaning phase, have yet to fully emerge and thus, the descriptions of each are conjectural. The corresponding dates for each are also somewhat arbitrary. The valued meaning phase began around 1950, and will continue through the next century. Its beginnings are marked by Systems Theory, the feminist movement and the ecology movement. The psychology of this phase is characterized by a sense of interdependence, valued choices and minimal affect.

General Systems Theory (GST) was an attempt to unify the sciences. Although originating early in this century, its ideas began to spread rapidly only after World War II. GST's central feature is its manner of examining any subject matter as a subsystem, system or supersystem. It provides a heuristic for taking different perspectives toward any event. For example, GST may examine an individual as a subsystem of a family with the family viewed as a subsystem of society, or GST may examine an individual as a system comprised of the subsystems of cognition, emotion and perception. Put simply, GST allows parts to be viewed as wholes and wholes to be viewed as parts. The primary criterion for choosing to view something as a part or a whole is the utility of the perspective.

The feminist movement, which also gained strength in the 1950s and 1960s, was also based in pragmatic considerations. More importantly, however, was its basis in axiological considerations of human freedom and equality. The religious, political, economic and civil liberties granted to men centuries earlier had yet to become integral to women's lives (Garfinkle, 1987). The women's movement stressed the importance of values in human affairs. Not only should women not be oppressed, but neither should "the colonized, the poor, the discriminated, the oppressed, the excluded from the benefits of prosperity, democracy and

peace" (Garfinkle, 1987, p. 3). The notion that oppression harmed and devalued both the oppressor and oppressed became concretized with the women's movement.

The ecology movement of the last three decades is also anchored in both pragmatism and axiology. The ecologists understood that continued exploitation of the planet would result in an uninhabitable or a radically altered environment. But there was more than mere pragmatism motivating the ecologists -- they considered it fundamentally wrong to exploit the environment without consideration of the needs of other life ensconced within it.

Each of the above movements has encouraged a greater need for pragmatic and axiological concerns to be involved in decision-making. It is these concerns that will also direct the meaning-making of this phase. Rather than focusing on coping with angst, individuals will evaluate the practical outcomes and value-dimensions of their choices. Meaning takes on a more positive outlook than it did in the anxious meaningless phase: Rather than choosing meaning to avoid angst and despair, meaning will be chosen to actively improve the condition of humanity.

I said earlier that the emotionality of this period will be minimal because I do not think individuals in this period will fully realize the degree of human achievement

involved in projecting meaning onto the world. Blocker (1974) pointed out that the projection of meaning is something to be celebrated as uniquely human, rather than despaired because of its absurdity. In the pragmatic meaning phase, however, various meanings are merely taken as useful or useless and thus are treated with relative neutrality. The next semiogenetic phase will be accompanied by joy in the meaning-making process.

Phase X: Joyful Meaning

I project the joyful meaning phase as beginning early in the twenty-second century. Specificity regarding the catalysts for this phase is not possible, but the one that may be most important is a greater understanding of spiritual existence. We can see the precursors for this in transpersonal psychology. Transpersonal theorists such as Wilber stress the importance of developing a consciousness that includes more than thought, emotion and conscience. Wilber argued that humans are capable of unity consciousness, or the direct experience of being one with the universe. This is a consciousness that transcends reason, emotion, value, language, physical experience and meaning, yet simultaneously encompasses them. Christ, Buddha, Lao-Tse and other sages achieved this level of consciousness, according to Wilber, and they exemplify its outcomes. These individuals transcended their selves (or

egos) and thus were able to move beyond the need for narrowly personal meanings or purposes.

The emphasis on global interdependence and the connectedness of things during the previous semiogenetic period should make the transpersonal notions of self-transcendence and non-attachment more palatable to society. The increased communal activity (e.g., peace movement, ecology movement) on a global scale of the previous phase will also be a catalyst for individuals to modify their consciousness. The trend toward physical and psychological health seen at the present may also contribute by introducing individuals to yoga and other meditative practices. Although these practices will in some cases be initiated for health reasons, they may become individual's spiritual practices as well.

Meaning will be seen as an awe-inspiring human creation for which humans should be proud, but also wary. They will be proud because meaning-making is a singularly human capacity. They will be wary about taking meaning too seriously and inadvertently mistaking the "map for the territory." Meaning-making will be a joyous activity in this phase because meaning will be seen as a uniquely human way to direct behaviour, make choices and lend coherence to the world. Angst will not be a predominant experience of this phase because the joyful meaning individual will not

expect the world to possess inherent meaning and thus, the individual will not suffer the disappointment and surprise experienced in the anxious meaningless phase. The meaninglessness of the universe will be taken as given and the meanings in the worlds will be taken as human achievements to be celebrated.

Conclusion

This analysis has attempted to show how processes, structures and outcomes of meaning-making have developed throughout the ages. Magic, myth, theology, metaphysics, science, existentialism, systems theory and esoteric religion have sequentially contributed to the manner in which humans create universal and personal meaning. Coherence, God-given purposiveness, nature-given purposiveness and human-created meaning are the respective ways humans have conceived of meaning. The overall semiogenetic trend is characterized by the increasing awareness of the projective quality of meaning, and the decreasing tendency to view external, non-human events to be intrinsically meaningful. Attributing meaning and purpose to external events provides a considerable amount of security and stability to human life; however, this view tends to reduce the possibility of individuals making conscious choices to guide their behaviour. Discovering that the world does not possess meaning can be disappointing

and may result in an overwhelming sense of responsibility and despair. However, as future ages will be better able to understand, despair is not necessary. It is only the expectation of an intrinsically meaningful world that causes feelings of disappointment and alienation. Without the expectation of meaning, as is manifested in Eastern esoteric religions, the projected nature of meaning is something to be enjoyed and celebrated.

CHAPTER IV

THE SOURCE OF MEANING

Ascertaining the source of meaning is perhaps the most significant philosophical problem in the study of meaning in life. It involves fundamental questions about the nature of truth and the origins of knowledge. In this chapter, the most significant perspectives on this problem are described and criticized. It will be shown that Frankl's (1966, 1969) contention that meaning is an objective aspect of the world possesses strong emotional appeal but inadequate philosophical substance. Similarly, Maslow's (1968, 1971) belief that meaning is an intrinsic emergent property of the person will be shown to be compelling but logically unconvincing. Finally, the various theories (Blocker, 1974; Kegan, 1984; Stein, 1983; Wilber, 1977; Yalom, 1980) that postulate meaning to be a human creation will be revealed as the most intellectually satisfying, but the least emotionally inviting. The analyses of the conceptions of the source of meaning are followed by a brief description of the relationship between meaning in life and linguistic meaning, a relationship that highlights the strength of viewing meaning as humanly created.

Meaning in Life as Discovered vs. Created

Frankl's Position

Frankl (1966, 1969) maintained that meanings and values are an objective aspect of the world. Frankl's ontology delineates three dimensions of the world, the physical, psychological and the noological, the last being the dimension that contains meanings and values. Only humans are capable of entering the noological realm, and only in this realm are valid life meanings found. To Frankl, valid life meanings are those that engender self-transcendence, or the ability to detach from one's self and direct the self towards another person or object. Meanings that occur within the psychological realm are self-fulfilling rather than self-transcendent, and thus Frankl considered them to be unauthentic life meanings.

Frankl's (1966, 1969) position holds considerable intuitive and emotional appeal. In everyday language we speak of "finding" meaning, "finding our niche," "discovering our calling," or "finding a cause" to which we can commit. We certainly make choices about the types of vocations we pursue, the people we love, and our attitudes toward situations, but whether these choices result in a sense of meaningfulness or not seems to be the result of something external to ourselves. The meaningfulness of these contexts is experienced as coming from the contexts

rather than from our conscious choices. For example, it is difficult to choose arbitrarily to love someone or to be devoted to merely any job. The meaning appears to emerge from the person or the job, not from ourselves.

Values and morals similarly are often experienced as having an objective nature. The "oughts" that implore us to act often appear to arise from situations rather than from personal choices. Whether we act upon an "ought" requires reflection and choice, but the imperative of the "ought" does not seem to undergo this process. For example, encountering a child in pain arouses an immediate sense that we ought to help. Whether we help or not is an issue we ponder, but the very need to ponder the choice arises from the child's predicament, not from ourselves.

Frankl's (1966, 1969) theory is not without weakness. The intuitive appeal of the theory is challenged by the intellectual difficulties encountered when defending the view that meanings possess an independent reality. Frankl defended his view through analogy, examples and occasional calls to experience. For instance, in explaining why he believed that meanings are not merely created, Frankl claimed that "it is one of the immediate data of life-experience that man is pushed by drives but pulled by meaning" (1966, p. 100). This "pull," however, is by no means self-evident or "immediate." "Pushes," "pulls," and

"drives" are theoretical constructs, not bases of human experience. When I experience hunger, for example, I am drawn or "pulled" toward food as much as I am "pushed" toward food by hunger pangs. Similarly, when I experience meaninglessness, I am "pushed" toward meaning by the ensuing discomfort as much as I am "pulled" toward meaning. As an experiencing individual, I find it difficult to identify the source of my meaning. Do I find things meaningful because they actually are meaningful, or do I find things meaningful because my consciousness creates meaning in accord with my past experiences, my biological make-up, my sociocultural conditions and my unconscious processes? These questions are not answered by "immediate data;" the immediate data of experience indicate only whether an event is meaningful or not meaningful. And, even accrediting experience with this decision is perhaps generous. Often, the experience of an event is simply confusing, and only after considerable reflection is meaning attributed to the experience, if meaning is consciously attributed at all.

Another of Frankl's (1966) defenses for the otherness of meaning is based on the existential concept of intentionality. As Frankl used the term, "intentionality" refers to the idea that "being human profoundly means being engaged and entangled in a situation, and confronted with a world whose objectivity and reality is in no way detracted

from by the subjectivity of the 'being' who is 'in the world'" (p. 102). To Frankl, the tension between the subject and the object is "the same as the tension between the 'I am' and the 'I ought,' between reality and ideal, between being and meaning" (p. 102). In making his point, Frankl equated "situation" or "object" with "meaning." This equation begs the question of whether "situations" and "objects" possess intrinsic meaning. Few would disagree that being human means being engaged in a world, but it remains arguable whether the world contains meanings, or whether meanings arise from the individual's entanglement with the world.

Frankl (1969) argued that values and meanings are not merely relative and subjective and therefore, that they possess a reality independent of human consciousness. To Frankl, "there is only one meaning to each situation, and this is its true meaning" (p. 61). Frankl's method of defense of the objectivity of meaning consisted primarily of examples. One of them drew a parallel between finding meaning in a situation and finding the solution to an arithmetic problem. In arithmetic, seven plus seven has only one correct solution. Frankl argued that situations similarly have only one meaning. This logic is weak, because Frankl failed to account for the fact that numerals and numbers are uniquely human inventions; they are symbols

created to represent reality. Unlike personal meanings, number systems and their operations are consensually agreed upon by a given culture. Consequently, there appear to be "true" and "objective" answers to mathematical problems, but this "objectivity" is rendered by cultural agreement. For example, the equation "1 + 1 = 10" is correct within a binary mathematical system but is incorrect within a decimal system. The "true" solution depends upon individuals agreeing upon a selected operating system rather than upon objective "truth."

Another example used by Frankl (1969) to defend the objectivity of meaning is an occasion in which a therapist did not influence a client to pay bills on time. Frankl argued that the therapist's behaviour was improper because "paying one's bills may have a meaning irrespective of whether or not one likes it and irrespective of the unconscious meaning it may have" (p. 52). This example is more related to the objectivity of values than the mathematical example because here, Frankl highlighted the issue of how individuals know what they <u>should</u> do or what they <u>ought</u> to do. Unfortunately, Frankl skimmed over the issued by claiming that people ought to pay their bills. He did not, however, address where this mandate arises. Although Frankl claimed to take a secular approach to meaning, implicit in all of his arguments is a Supreme Being

who has placed in the world immutable values that individuals strive to discover, and from which individuals find meaning (Morgan, 1983). In a statement that explicitly acknowledges this belief, Frankl claimed that:

> I would say that the ultimate meaning...is no longer a matter of thinking but rather a matter of believing. We do not catch hold of it on intellectual grounds but on existential grounds, out of our whole being, i.e., through faith. But it is my contention that faith in the ultimate meaning is preceded by trust in an ultimate being, by trust in God. (p. 145)

Here, Frankl arrived at the crux of the matter. Values, true meanings, and the "shoulds" and "oughts" of morality originate from God. Our conscience provides an intuitive link with God's wishes, provided we have the faith necessary to trust our conscience.

There is little theoretical difficulty with Frankl's (1969) faith in God. Ultimately, the pursuit of values and life meanings demands faith in something, whether it be God, human nature, Platonic forms, human cognition or society. There is an ontological problem with Frankl's position, however. Frankl assumed that God provides values and meanings to humans. As will be shown when Wilber's (1977) position is described, it is logically sound to argue that God or Spirit is <u>beyond</u> value and meaning. To Wilber,

Spirit transcends values, meanings and reasons, transcends the dualisms (e.g., good/bad, beauty/ugliness, truth/falsehood) that dominate human cognition, and transcends the causality inherent within human purpose and meaning (e.g., "If I do this, then..."). The difficulty with Frankl's view of the spiritual realm is not his faith in God, but in his conception of God.

Frankl's (1966, 1969) position holds strong appeal for many individuals. It is comforting to believe that meanings and values are objective entities that await discovery. As evidenced in the historical examination of Chapter III, the position that meanings and values are not freely created has been held for many centuries. Regardless of its subjective appeal, however, Frankl's position is too fraught with intellectual difficulties to be philosophically acceptable. Virtually all of the evidence that is provided in support of the position relies on human experience rather than logic or empirical findings. Accounting for experience is important, but there is abundant evidence that experience cannot be solely relied upon when attempting to understand the workings of the world (e.g., experience informs us that the sun moves around the earth) or human behaviour (e.g., experience tells us nothing about the mechanism of repression because the act of repression is not experienced). Frankl's theory requires a greater balance of

experiential, empirical and logical support to be convincing.

Maslow's Position

A primary goal of Maslow's (1968, 1971) was to develop a nontheological basis for values. Maslow assumed that values are intrinsic potentialities of humanness that emerge when the organism's wisdom is followed. In Maslow's words:

> Man demonstrates in his own nature a pressure toward fuller and fuller Being, more and more perfect actualization of his humanness in exactly the same naturalistic, scientific sense that an acorn may be said to be "pressing toward" being an oak tree.... The environment does not give him potentialities or capacities; he has them in inchoate or embryonic form.... And creativeness, spontaneity, selfhood, authenticity, caring for others, being able to love, yearning for truth are embryonic potentialities belonging to his species-membership. (1968, p. 160)

Maslow understood the study of values to involve the examination of individuals who approximated the "perfect actualization" of humanness. The values of individuals displaying full humanness reflect the innate potential values of the species in the same way the behaviours of adult dogs reflect the potential capabilities of puppies. Consequently, the study of values entails delineating the

values held by the most fully human individuals; individuals who appear to be operating to the best of their potentials. The values identified via this procedure are understood to represent the potential values of the human species. For example, if fully human individuals value beauty, Maslow understood this to indicate that beauty is an objective value shared by all humans, even if this value is not manifested by all individuals.

Maslow's (1968, 1971) search for the basis for objective values is a compelling one. The biological sciences have successfully used the method of observing fully developed specimens for the purpose of predicting the direction of growth in developing organisms. In the physical realm, this method of predicting growth is highly resistant to logical attack. In fact, it may be impossible to find another methodology by which growth characteristics may be predicted. Consider the difficulties in predicting the growth outcomes of kittens without being allowed to observe adult cats!

Another important benefit of Maslow's approach to values is that it does not rely on speculation about a spiritual dimension to existence. Ascertaining values through arguments about spiritual concerns is a process laden with epistemological difficulties. Reliable knowledge is difficult to obtain in the spiritual realm, as evidenced

by the ubiquitous debates about values and morals in the religious community. By approaching the issue naturalistically, Maslow's method had the potential to avoid some of the ambiguity inherent within spiritual problems.

Maslow's (1968, 1971) theory of values and meaning is also characterized by several epistemological drawbacks. Brewster Smith (1973) delineated three important difficulties in Maslow's (e.g., 1968) approach to values and meaning. The first difficulty "has to do with the boot-straps operation by which [Maslow] selected his 'sample' of self-actualizing people" (p. 24). Smith noted that the selection of fully human individuals is made on the basis of pre-selected values. The use of these selected individuals to prove that certain values are intrinsic to human nature is clearly inadequate. Smith argued that Maslow's

> empirical definition of psychological health or self-actualization thus rests, at root, on his own implicit values that underlies this global judgment.... In the inherent nature of the case, the dice are loaded toward Maslow's own values. I like them, but that is beside the point. (p. 24)

This problem is not merely a methodological flaw. The attempt to identify "fully human" individuals begins with establishing criteria regarding "full humanness." The criteria are necessarily value-laden because they identify

the "best" or the "good" in human functioning. The use of value-laden criteria guarantees that certain values will be exemplified by the identified population. Thus, the second difficulty with Maslow's (e.g., 1968) approach is that it cannot prove that values exist within humans as potentialities. Smith (1973) acknowledged that it cannot be proved that values are not intrinsic to human nature, but he argued that the burden of proof for their existence is upon Maslow.

The third difficulty with Maslow's (e.g., 1968) conception is its neglect of the multipotentiality of humans. Smith (1973) maintained that individuals, especially in comparison to oak trees or tigers, have multiple potentialities, the emergence of which are based on choices and circumstances. "Vice and evil are as much in the range of human potentiality...as virtue; specialization as much as 'well-rounded' development" (p. 25). This brings us back to the first problem in Maslow's conception: Maslow's selection of individuals who were "being all they can be" neglected those individuals who were being evil, deceitful and malicious to the maximum of the their abilities.

Maslow's (e.g., 1968) contention that values are found within the human organism is not subject to empirical verification. Maslow's hope for an empirical "fusion of

fact and value" is unlikely to be realized because the selection of individuals displaying "full humanness" is a value-laden process. The "facts" that are thus discoverable are those that correspond to pre-selected value orientations. These problems do not render Maslow's view incorrect; rather, they indicate that his search for values was mistakenly described by himself as an empirical enterprise.

Meaning as a Human Creation

Blocker (1974), Kegan (1984), Stein (1983), Wilber (1977) and Yalom (1980) each contended that meaning is a creation of the human mind. To these theorists, meaning and purpose are perceptual and cognitive projections onto reality. These theorists offer little evidence to prove their position: they believe the burden of proof in this matter rests with those who claim that meaning exists independently of human cognition. However, theorists in this group offer experiential and rational support for their position.

The therapist Sheldon Kopp described the atheistic existential position on meaning very simply: "Everything works. Nothing works for very long" (1981, p. 174). Regardless of how certain individuals feel about the particular meanings they have "found," and regardless of how "true" these meanings appear to be, experience will

eventually uncover the subjectivity, temporality and relativity of all meanings. Atheistic existentialists hold that the "only true absolute is that there are no absolutes" (Yalom, 1980, p. 423). The experienced world is a contingent world determined by human choice and action. The bulk of the evidence to support the atheistic existential viewpoint is taken from analyses of human experience. Although our immediate experience indicates that meaning is found, a more thorough investigation uncovers our choices in the meaning-making process, according to atheistic existentialists.

Kegan (1984) defended his constructivist position by calling upon findings in the areas of perception and cognition. Perceptual illusions and ambiguous figures that draw more than one interpretation (e.g., the young woman/old woman (Boring, 1930)) demonstrate that humans are active in their constitution of reality; they make meaning from sensory stimuli rather than take meaning from stimuli. In studies of cognition, Piaget (e.g., 1970) has perhaps been the most prominent advocate of the idea that meaning is constructed, albeit in predictable ways. To Piaget, humans undergo considerable qualitative changes in the way they make meaning of their surroundings, and these changes indicate the active nature of human meaning-making. If meaning is an objective ingredient within the environment,

it would be expected that all individuals would discover similar meanings within similar events.

The contention that humans interpret their world is indisputable, and thus the constructivist position possesses some first-hand credence. However, the fact that individuals live in an interpreted world is not proof that the world is intrinsically meaningless. Frankl (1969) argued that the meanings in situations are not necessarily perceived directly; interpretation is necessary to ascertain the nature of situational meanings. Thus, both the constructivists and the "meaning as found" theorists are able to account for human interpretation of meaning.

Stein's (1983) psychoanalytic argument is quite simple on the surface. To Stein, thought and substance are dissimilar. Thought is a process that makes sense of reality through the use of symbolism. Since thought is an ability of humans, and is not an ability of reality, meaning must be created by humans rather than by reality. Stein further argued that "we have vested unconscious interests in not perceiving reality undistorted" (p. 395), a view that implies that it is possible to understand and perceive reality undistorted. Stein explicitly argued that reality possesses no meaning but implicitly argued that there is a true meaning of events that could be grasped if we could rid ourselves of unconscious defenses. But Stein also

maintained that the fact that our understanding of reality is mediated by symbolism results in inevitable distortions and misrepresentations of reality. Thus Stein held contradictory positions: (a) reality can be perceived undistorted, (b) reality is known only through symbolism, (c) symbolism unavoidably distorts "true" reality, and thus (d) reality cannot be perceived undistorted.

Blocker (1974) saw through and countered Stein's (1983) general thesis. For example, Blocker analyzed Nietzsche's (1964) theory of truth, a theory similar in many regards to Stein's:

> Nietzsche saw that a thoroughly honest exploration into the conditions of cognition revealed that knowledge was based unalterably on projection, from which he concluded that knowledge was a meaningless illusion. This is obviously contradictory. If it's knowledge, it's not illusory; if it's illusory, it's not knowledge. The theory assumes that truth is both projection and nonprojection. On the one hand, the conclusion states that knowledge <u>is</u> projection; on the other hand, it asserts that our so-called knowledge is a meaningless illusion, and this implies that real knowledge is <u>not</u> projection. (p. 83)

To Blocker, Nietzsche's contradiction arose because his argument was based on the realist criterion of meaning and

truth. The realist criterion for truth is a direct correspondence between meaning and reality. Rather than concluding that there is no truth because this correspondence does not occur, Nietzsche attempted to redefine truth as meanings that are socially and biologically useful. If Nietzsche would have stopped here, he would have escaped the contradictory claim that knowledge is a "meaningless illusion." However, Nietzsche compared the utilitarian view of truth to the (abandoned) realist understanding of truth and concluded that truth is deceptive. To thus call truth deceptive belies Nietzsche's expectation that truth which does not meet the realist criterion is not really "truth" at all.

Blocker (1974) asked a question of great relevance: "Why should it [truth] mirror reality, except on terms dictated by the deposed realist or correspondence sense of truth?" (p. 83). Blocker pointed out the deep-rooted tendency of theorists conceptualizing meaning and individuals personally grappling with meaning to conceive of meaning as a sham if it does not correspond to reality: that is, if meaning is projective. To say meaning is thus an illusion or sham is like saying "that the physical world is ugly because there are no objective aesthetic values or, less decorously, that a man is naked because his clothes are unfashionable" (p. 83). Blocker thus maintained that

meaning is projective and that it could not be otherwise. However, this does not make meaning illusory or unimportant. We use meaning as a tool by which we make sense of our world, communicate with others, and create purpose for ourselves. None of these activities require the illusion that meaning is not projective.

Blocker (1974), Kegan (1984), Kopp (1981), Stein (1983) and Yalom (1980) each placed the making of meaning squarely within human consciousness, thereby implying that the mind and its products are separate from physical reality. This may be problematic because it raises the difficult epistemological question of how qualitatively different and separate entities, mind and matter, can influence each other. More directly, this position raises the problem of how the mind can know of something from which it is separate. Separate entities cannot interact without creating a connection between themselves, at which point they are no longer separate. Thus, the position is self-contradictory. The details of this problem will not be entered into here: it suffices to point out that the issue is an old one, faced most prominently by Plato, and that it has yet to be resolved. The central point is that this dualistic view is a rather tenuous base upon which to rest a theory of meaning, and thus it is important to ascertain whether the theories reviewed above actually are dualistic.

and, if they are, whether they necessarily are.

Given the problem of understanding meaning and its referents to be separated, it seems advantageous to adopt a non-dualistic philosophy. Non-dualistic theories escape the dualistic problem with the realization that there are no separations -- everything is connected. The connectedness of everything does not imply that the universe is undifferentiated, however. The non-dualistic view allows for distinctions to be made between various aspects of the universe (e.g., North American is a distinct part of earth but is not separate from earth). Blocker (1974) and Yalom (1980) maintained that their ideas grew out of a non-dualistic stance, that they do not understand mind and body to be separate, and that the mental and physical are distinct. Kegan (1984), Kopp (1981) and Stein (1983) implied that they hold the same views, without saying so explicitly. Claiming that a theory is non-dualistic does not mean that the theory is non-dualistic, however. The claim that mind and matter are distinct but not separate does little to explain what the distinctions are, or how the two entities are connected.

Blocker's resolution of the mind/body antinomy is perhaps direct and encompassing. Answering the question of how the mind/body problem came to be a dilemma, Blocker argued that

> the reason...is the objectivist view of meaning; i.e., they have taken their own talk too literally, assuming a direct and objective correspondence between words and objects. In ordinary speech we do talk of minds and bodies and we do draw some sort of distinction between them.... But this is just a way of speaking; we don't mean that there are two distinct classes of objects, minds and bodies.... What the traditional philosopher has failed to see is that words don't relate to the world in this simple mechanical correspondence fashion. But why does the philosopher insist on this correspondence metaphor? Because he wants to get at the real meaning, the real objective nature of things.... The root of his thinking and the drive behind it is the realist criterion of meaning. (pp. 89-90).

To put it in different words, the mind/body problem (or any other antimony) arises when we expect meaning to correspond directly to reality. To Blocker, the concept "mind" does not directly correspond to something that actually is mind in reality; neither does the concept "body" correspond to "true" and actual bodies. These labels artificially separate a reality that possesses no separations.

The theorists reviewed above concluded that the world is meaningless. Although this view can be extrapolated to

include the idea that the world also possesses no spiritual element, this extension is not necessary. Wilber's (1977) transpersonal theory, left to be discussed last because of its similarities to Blocker's (1974) framework, includes the notion of a meaningless reality that incorporates a spiritual dimension. Wilber argued that

> if something is to take on meaning or significance, that is, if it is to point beyond itself, then the universe has necessarily to be split into at least two fragments: one which points, and one which is pointed to....the real world has no meaning, it points to nothing because there is nothing outside of it to which it can point!... To say the real world is meaning-less, point-less, or value-less, is not, however, to say that it is moronic, chaotic, absurd, etc. for these are just more values, more meanings, only negative in tone. Rather, it is to say that the real world points to nothing nor can be pointed to, and thus is profoundly beyond meaning and evaluation, whether positive or negative. (pp. 228-229)

To Wilber, the making of meaning is a human process used to divide and fragment reality and thus make reality more manageable. Agreeing with Blocker, Wilber did not claim that a projected meaning is therefore false; rather, he understood the concepts of "true" and "false" to be part of

meaning systems and to be applicable only within meaning systems. However, Wilber maintained that meaning is illusory because it draws us into the trap of believing that reality is fragmented into the components labelled by our meaning systems. Rather than seeing meaning as the "map of the territory" (Korzybski, 1948), we confuse the map with the territory.

The Spirit is not abandoned in Wilber's (1977) system. Spirit, like reality, is understood to be radically beyond meaning, value and purpose. The realm of the Spirit (remembering that this realm is distinct but not separated from any other realm) transcends meaning with its separations and dualisms. Spirit, Atman, God, the Tao, or Brahmin is not good or evil, just or unjust, purposeful or non-purposeful, reasonable or unreasonable, or one or many, because it transcends all possible meaning labels. No symbolic representation is adequate to Spirit; rather, all symbols are images that prevent us from experiencing Spirit directly. Wilber put the point strongly:

> No Christian in his right mind would confuse a plastic statue or image of Christ with Christ himself, but many usually confuse their mental images of Christ as Great, Glorious, Loving, or whatever, with Christ himself, yet these are every bit as much graven images as are the Golden Calf and the Icon of Baal. (p. 65)

Wilber obviously did not prove the existence of Spirit. Rather, he demonstrated that a model of a meaningless universe need not necessarily be atheistic. (A tangential point is that Wilber's model is not pantheistic: i.e., it does not equate Spirit with reality). The inclusion of the Spirit is important because of the considerable experiential evidence of a spiritual dimension to reality. Many humans exert considerable energy toward spiritual concerns, and many claim to have experienced Spirit directly. In atheistic models of meaning, these experiences are relegated to the realm of pathological delusions and defenses (cf. Stein, 1983). In Wilber's model, these experiences (or at least some of them -- many are pathological) can be recognized as legitimate.

Models that propose meaning as a human creation appear to be more logically consistent than those that contend that meaning is found. However, a significant difficulty faced by the former models is adequately explaining human morals and values. Whereas theorists such as Frankl (1966, 1969) have recourse to claiming that the "shoulds" and "oughts" of morality originate from a Supreme Being, theorists of a created meaning must find other ways of explaining why humans behave morally, why some humans appear to be more morally developed than others, and why morality appears to be something more than merely an agreed upon set of societal

rules. Although the position cannot be proved, the belief that values possess an objective reality cannot be casually dismissed.

The Relationship between Meaning in Life and Linguistic Meaning

One of the interesting features of both Blocker's (1974) and Wilber's (1977) models is the conceptual connection between meaning in life and linguistic meaning. This is an important connection for two primary reasons: (a) it seems logical to expect that meaning in life and linguistic meaning are more than peripherally related, and (b) an examination of language acquisition may help to illuminate how meaning in life is acquired, and how meaning in life is experienced as discovered rather than created. The first point is merely one of intellectual convenience and sensibility. It seems reasonable to suppose that the various ways that humans make meaning possess similar roots or "deep structures," and that they are not therefore completely disparate processes. The second point is considerably more significant: language acquisition has been extensively studied and, although it is far from completely understood, an understanding of language acquisition may provide theorists of meaning in life with useful perspectives. Although it is not the purpose of this work to pursue all the conceptual connections between

meaning in life and linguistic meaning, a brief overview of language acquisition may shed light on the problem of the source of meaning and, more specifically, on the reason that most of us feel that we discover rather than create our meanings.

When meaning is understood to be humanly created, questions must be answered regarding the strong experience of discovering, rather than creating, meaning. When I find myself feeling as though my life is meaningless, it seems difficult to merely create a meaning to which I can passionately commit. I tend to search from meaning, hoping that at some point I will connect with some cause or person that I become committed to. This process will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter, but for the moment consider the parallels between discovering language and discovering life meaning. All theories of language acquisition, regardless of how they differ in their details, agree that language is socially acquired. Language is ultimately a human creation, but each child who acquires linguistic abilities is <u>discovering</u> the forms and processes of his or her linguistic community. The child does not, and cannot, understand the arbitrariness of symbols and their usages. Nor does the child maintain those symbols that were personally created (e.g., "wa-wa" is abandoned for "water"). Social functioning requires conformity to social rules and

norms, the most central set of which is the society's language. Thus, the child directs his or her efforts toward discovering socially accepted symbols and their referents rather than creating personal symbols.

The process of linguistic discovery is a lengthy and intense one, continuing at least until adolescence when the youth is capable of questioning the apparently absolute nature of symbols. In a parallel and related fashion, the child discovers what is generally meaningful to society during the process of discovering society's symbols. In other words, the child cannot help but acquire and assimilate more global meaning systems (e.g., religion, democracy) than merely language. And, again, the child does so without the ability to question the relative worth of the meaning systems. Consequently, the first portion of life is spent <u>discovering</u> meaning, in all its forms, rather than consciously <u>creating</u> meaning. The impact of this process is enormous because, although adolescents become capable of questioning the adequacy of societal meanings, the very tools, concepts and symbols they use to proceed with this inquiry are the ones that they have acquired from the society they are questioning! In other words, they are attempting to question a system with the very system under examination. This is a circular process that often results in a position that supports the system. It appears that it

may be necessary for an intellectual or emotional crisis to occur for the adolescent to break out of this circle. Otherwise, the adolescent cannot fully escape the enmeshment with social meanings and create meaning beyond the system itself.

Discussion

Each view of the source of meaning possesses strengths and drawbacks. Frankl's (1966, 1969) and Maslow's (1968, 1971) positions of a found meaning account for our experience of finding meaning rather than creating it. Their positions help to explain why meaninglessness is often difficult to overcome; meaningfulness comes through an active search rather than a conscious creation. Their positions also provide explanations for the apparently absolute nature of human values and morality. However, Frankl's view relies on the assumption of some form of Supreme Being that provides values and meanings to humans. This is a tenuous assumption, as is Maslow's assumption that values and meanings are provided by human nature. Theorists such as Blocker (1974), Kegan (1984), Stein (1983), Wilber (1977) and Yalom (1980), who maintain that meanings and values are humanly created, surmount these difficulties but do so at the expense of being unable to convincingly explain the seemingly absolute nature of human values.

The inability of the "meaning is created" theorists to

explain the strength of moral imperatives is much less problematic than the inability of the "meaning is found" theorists to explain the source of found meaning. It simply makes more sense to maintain that meanings are humanly created. Further, it is reasonable to do this within a non-dualistic framework and thus avoid problems such as the mind/body antinomy. Also, examining meaning as a created phenomenon is likely to open more theoretical doors that uncover the processes by which humans create meaning. This view allows links to be made with other human processes such as the creation of language, and it allows meaning to be understood as a truly psychological phenomenon.

CHAPTER V

THE PROCESS OF CREATING MEANING IN LIFE

The processes that create meaning in life are not understood, nor are the similarities and differences between these processes and other meaning-making processes. The extent to which conscious and unconscious processes are involved in creating meaning in life is equally uncertain. Finally, the extent to which these processes change with development are virtually unknown.

This chapter reviews the conceptual and empirical investigations of the processes involved in creating meaning in life. The intent is to identify and clarify important areas of debate, as well as to uncover central questions that have yet to be adequately answered.

The Uniqueness of Meaning in Life Processes

A number of theorists consider meaning in life to arise from a unique set of processes involving the determination and evaluation of one's value and place within a system (e.g., Erikson, 1963; Frankl, 1969; Maslow, 1970). Erikson's developmental task of establishing integrity in later adulthood involves assessing the worth of one's life. Frankl understood meaning in life to be a conscious process whereby presented situations are evaluated with respect to one's conscience, and the true meaning of the situation is

then identified. Maslow conceived meaning in life to be a subset of the self-actualization process. Individuals whose basic needs are gratified spontaneously find themselves seeking a mission or cause that is in concordance with their true selves. Mitchell (1975) argued that the concern of meaning in life first emerges when newly developed cognitive abilities of adolescence allow individuals to question societal and personal values.

In their review of conceptions of meaning in life, Battista and Almond (1973) identified underlying processes common to each conception: (a) finding or creating a framework or goal from which life can be viewed, (b) actively committing to this concept of meaning in life, (c) perceiving life as related to or fulfilling this concept, and (d) experiencing this fulfilment as a "feeling of integration, relatedness, or significance" (p. 410). Implicit within Battista and Almond's description is that each of these processes is conscious. Conceptualizing the creation of meaning in life in terms of these four processes is useful. However, many questions remain unanswered about how these processes occur. For example, creating a life goal is surely not merely a matter of examining options and selecting one. Numerous structural components come into play in this process, including personality characteristics, childhood experiences, socioeconomic conditions, and genetic

attributes. Further, it is unlikely that creating a life framework or goal is a single process; other processes also combine to produce this larger process. For example, defensive processes used to minimize anxiety likely influence how an individual selects a life framework or goal. Also, cognitive processes influence when and how the selection of a life framework can occur. Adaptive processes, by which an individual maintains some measure of conformity with his or her culture, also influence.

The conventional manner of conceiving the processes involved in meaning in life needs to be examined in greater depth. The current superficiality of most conceptions is theoretically and practically limiting. Theoretically, it is important to conceive meaning in life within a broader framework of meaning-making in general and thus be able to precisely delineate the various processes involved in meaning in life. Practically, it is important for therapists to understand the complexity of creating meaning in life so they may better assist clients for whom meaning is a concern. The first step in this clarification process is to examine the assumption that meaning in life involves primarily conscious processes.

The Consciousness of Meaning in Life

Most theorists and researchers of meaning in life assume that the creation of meaning is a uniquely conscious

process (e.g., Frankl, 1969; Maslow, 1970; Yalom, 1980). Their rationale is that creating meaning requires conceptualization and thus, consciousness. Although there is no doubt that humans create meaning consciously, it is doubtful that this is their exclusive mode of meaning-making. As Stein (1983) argued, the making of meaning could be largely under the control of unconscious processes. Stein maintained that the tendency to conceive meaning as "found" rather than created belies a need to construe meaning as beyond our control. When viewed as an external force, meaning acts as an imperative for action and perception, and thus alleviates us from assuming responsibility for our desires and choices. Meaning that is chosen unconsciously and defensively reveals itself by its rigidity. With defensive meanings "the symbolic equation is rigid: the flag must <u>be</u> the nation, the word or wish must <u>be</u> the thing or deed, whiteness (in Western culture) <u>is</u> purity, and so on" (p. 396).

Frankl argued against the psychoanalytic interpretation of meaning: "As for myself, I would not be willing to live for the sake of my reaction formations, even less to die for the sake of my defense mechanisms" (1969, p. 54). Frankl misconstrued the nature of defense mechanisms with this rationale (people who die for their defense mechanisms are not conscious of doing so, and thus do not perceive

themselves as dying for defense mechanisms), but his point is compelling. The psychoanalytic attribution of all meanings to diverted instinctual impulses is theoretically clumsy and overly reductionistic. However, it is not necessary to adopt Stein's (1983) stance on the unconscious origins of meaning to agree that some individuals in certain instances may be unconsciously motivated to "find" particular forms of meaning in life. What is problematic is declaring that meaning in life is "nothing but" the result of defensive manoeuvres or that it is "nothing but" the outcome of conscious choice. Both conscious and unconscious processes likely influence meaning in life.

Unfortunately, the question of the consciousness of meaning cannot be satisfactorily answered by logical, experiential or empirical methods. Logical arguments are compelling, but they alone cannot substantiate the processes of meaning-making. Experiential evidence sheds light on the issue, but conscious experience cannot enlighten us about unconscious defensive processes. Regardless of how seemingly "conscious" a decision about meaning appears, it can be argued that the decision is <u>motivated</u> by unconscious forces. Empirical methods fail to resolve the problem because neither conscious nor unconscious processes are observable. Also, the nature of arguments regarding the workings of the unconscious mind restrict the ability of

empirical studies to demonstrations of how unconscious processes may influence conscious decisions. Theorists who maintain that unconscious forces are powerful influences on behaviour always have recourse to "explaining away" evidence suggesting that conscious processes are responsible for behaviour. In other words, all behaviours are under the influence of unconscious mechanisms. On the other hand, evidence of the influence of unconscious processes is not easily explained away by theorists attempting to demonstrate the conscious nature of a phenomenon. An example may help to illustrate this point. Morris and Morris (1978) studied the perceived purposefulness of religious converts and nonconverts. The convert group's view of their lives showed a significantly higher sense of purpose than did the nonconvert group's view of their lives. Both groups were also given an "irrelevant matching task," reproduced below:

Ex.	men	within
1.	fine	candle
2.	card	save
3.	go	fix
4.	store	television
5.	bad	hello (p. 17)

The words in each column were drawn randomly from a dictionary and assigned randomly to the columns: i.e., the task was designed with no intrinsic purpose. After

completing the task, subjects were asked "Do you notice the pattern to the questions and answers in the above matching task?" (p. 17). Converts were found to be more likely than nonconverts to claim "with greater certainty to have apprehended 'the' purposeful pattern" (p. 15). Morris and Morris interpreted this finding to indicate that converts have a greater need to find purpose than nonconverts, and that this need generalizes across all life situations. Thus, although converts may feel that their decision to convert to a religion results from conscious choice, the findings of the study indicate that their choices are not made freely.

Morris and Morris' (1978) study does not prove that meaning or purpose in life is determined or even influenced by unconscious processes. Rather, it renders suspect the sole reign of conscious choice on decisions regarding meaning and purpose. To design a study with the opposite effect (i.e., to render suspect the influence of unconscious processes on meaning decisions) is an extremely complex task. No empirical study can rule out unconscious influences because unconscious processes are not observable. However, the workings of the unconscious can always be called upon to explain empirical findings.

Given the impossibility of proving the relative influence of conscious and unconscious processes on meaning-

making, there is no recourse but to either dismiss the issue as irrelevant or resolve the problem with circumstantial evidence from logical, experiential and empirical domains.

The question of how individuals make meaning is too important to dismiss, for two significant reasons. First, the way the problem is resolved impacts upon other theoretical concerns, such as the relative impact on meaning-making of early experience, psychopathology, and unfulfilled needs. If meaning-making is a purely conscious process, these structural components may minimally effect the way individuals find meaning in life; however, if meaning-making is a partially unconscious process, structures such as needs would influence meaning in life in powerful ways. Second, understanding the consciousness of meaning-making has an important bearing on counselling interventions. Currently, therapies explicitly concerned with meaning in life (e.g., Frankl, 1969; Yalom, 1980) carry the assumption that meaning-making is a conscious process. These therapies approach the task of meaning-making as a process in which individuals identify and assess desires, contextual constraints and opportunities, then choose attitudes and behaviours accordingly. This emphasis on conscious decision processes may leave important unconscious considerations untouched. For example, consider an individual whose upbringing has entrenched the idea that a

meaningful life is one that involves serving others, but whose experience has not been adequate to fulfilling personal needs for love and attachment. In therapy, the individual is likely to espouse the desire to fulfil his or her quest for meaning through service to others, a desire that is unlikely to be viewed as unhealthy or abnormal by the therapist. Consequently, the therapeutic encounter may be resolved with the individual choosing to enter a helping profession and thus "find" meaning in life. This decision may not be problematic, but it is conceivable that the individual's unexamined need for love may negatively influence his or her ability to help others. This inability to help others may, in turn, reduce the likelihood of the work being satisfying and meaningful. Further, the inability to help others may deal a serious blow to the individual's self-esteem. Overall, the individual would have been better served with a therapy directed toward identifying and resolving unmet needs, rather than with prematurely jumping at the opportunity to "find" meaning. (As a qualifier to this example, it is likely that a skilled therapist, regardless of theoretical orientation, would help to uncover the individual's true needs; however, it is important to incorporate what the skilled therapist knows into a theoretical framework).

The theoretical and practical importance of

understanding the relative consciousness and unconsciousness of meaning-making demands that the problem not be dismissed as difficult and unsolvable. At worst, it is more prudent to temporarily conclude that both unconscious and conscious processes are involved in meaning-making than to maintain that meaning is either consciously or unconsciously produced -- at least until convincing evidence to the contrary has been verified.

Language, Meaning in Life and Development

As alluded to in the previous chapter, it may be useful to understand the process of making meaning in life by comparing it to the process of creating meaning through language. Language acquisition is a more concrete (and better researched) phenomenon than the creation of meaning in life; thus, an inquiry into its nature may clarify currently vague issues in meaning in life.

One of the central characteristics of language processes is their social nature. Language is not acquired in a vacuum; rather, it occurs within the interplay of social interaction. On the most elementary level, children exposed only to French learn only French. Similarly, individuals exposed to the broader meaning systems that give rise to meaning in life will initially acquire a culturally constrained set of meanings. Whether or not they will create meanings outside this system is a more complex

question than whether or not individuals will choose to learn a second language.

In the previous chapter, it was argued that emotional or intellectual crises may precipitate the individual's ability to break free of culturally acquired meaning systems. This hypothesis, however, is difficult to confirm. Further, it may be impossible to specify the types and degrees of crises required to allow individuals to not only question their current meaning systems, but to question these systems with intellectual tools derived from outside of the systems. The condition that Mitchell (1975) described as "transitory nihilism" (a temporary nihilistic worldview resulting from formal cognitive abilities that allow youth to question societal values and norms) is apparently an insufficient condition for helping youth to establish new systems of meaning. For example, Posterski and Bibby's (1989) survey of Canadian youth indicated that the vast majority of youth adopt conventional values, norms and beliefs. In their words,

> The values which young people rate as important reflect the values which are promoted in Canadian society. The placement of imagination and creativity at the bottom of the scale of valued means suggests that many young people are more inclined to repeat what they have seen around them than they are inclined to launch out into

> the unknown. The majority seem more inclined to conform than to innovate. (p. 10)

Transitory nihilism, if it is as prevalent as Mitchell indicated, may result in youth questioning their beliefs and perhaps re-adopting their culture's values in a more internalized way, but it may be insufficient to help youth create new meaning systems.

It seems probable that most individuals remain bound to broad social meaning systems internalized in childhood. However, within these constrained sets of meanings there exist an astronomical number of ways meaning in life may be individually conceived and enacted. Frankl (1969) argued that each person's meaning is unique because of different day-to-day life situations. Beyond this uniqueness, Frankl identified three general sources of meaning: work, love and suffering. To Frankl, these three areas encompass the infinite variety of specific life meanings. A great deal of subsequent research has attempted to classify and categorize life meanings (DeVogler & Ebersole, 1980, 1981, 1983; DeVogler-Ebersole & Ebersole, 1985; Ebersole & DeVogler, 1981). This research is important because it provides a way to organize a bewildering variety of individual life meanings. However, an equally important task is to render comprehensible the common developmental patterns and themes that lead individuals to find meaning in life.

Researchers would be well served by identifying how individuals create meaning in life -- which brings us back to language. Language acquisition is perhaps the most universal, observable and consistent process of human meaning-making. Barring abnormality, most individuals' initial attempts to make meaning occur with acquiring the symbol systems of their caregivers. Simple naming is followed by telegraphic utterances that eventually lead to formal statements and requests. The child makes meaning of the environment in cooperation with the primary caregivers. Kegan (1984) is the only theorist apart from Stein (1983) who has attempted to explicate the relationships between meaning in life and other forms of meaning-making. To Kegan, individuals are meaning-makers from birth to death, but the nature of their meanings change developmentally. The first attempts to make meaning are socially given. The child's responsibility is to assimilate existing language conventions. This assimilation also occurs later in development, when formal education allows the child to acquire increasingly formal symbolization systems such as written language and mathematics. Kegan described an example of this type of meaning-making, and he pulled out the underlying meaning of the event:

> These days my daughter is learning to read. I watch her listening intently to her own announcement of each

> letter's sound. "SIH-AEH-NIH-DUH," she says, peering over these symbols, sitting still among these sounds which do not yet cohere for her. "SAAN-DUH." It is still an alien sound the way she says it, something strange and apart from her. She waits, strenuously. "SAND!" she says, arriving home.
>
> ...I find myself terribly moved by this tiny dignity. When her forehead furls and I see her there so intent, something sympathetic flexes in my heart.... Being in another person's presence while she so honestly labors in an astonishingly intimate activity - the activity of making sense - is somehow very touching.... This is an experience we seem to have more often with very young people than with adolescents and adults.... The personal activity of meaning actually has as much to do with an adult's struggle to recognize herself in the midst of conflicting and changing feelings as it has to do with a young girl's struggle to recognize a word. (pp. 15-16)

To Kegan (1984), meaning-making encompasses everything humans do; "meaning in life" is merely a special form of meaning-making. The making of meaning is a continual process that takes on different general forms at various levels of development. As the self changes, so also does the individual's way of making sense of the world. From

making sense of society's symbol systems during early childhood, to making sense of social rules and roles in middle childhood, and later to evaluating social rules and roles during adolescence, individuals' meaning systems become increasingly differentiated and integrated.

A conceptual problem with Kegan's (1984) approach to meaning-making processes is that it is too general to be of practical assistance to theorists of meaning in life. When virtually all human activity is conceived to be a subset of meaning-making, "meaning-making" loses its value as a theoretical construct. This is especially true for theorists attempting to understand meaning in life, a phenomena concerned with personal significance, purpose and direction. On the other hand, an approach such as Kegan's is vital to understanding the processes of meaning in life. It is unlikely that the creation of meaning in life is unrelated to other meaning-making events. The challenge for theorists is to understand the parallels between meaning in life and general meaning-making without losing the specificity and utility of the concept "meaning in life." One way that this may be achieved is by following Kegan's approach, modifying it so that meaning in life is understood as a special form of meaning-making. This manner of conceiving the processes of meaning accommodates parallels between meaning in life and general meaning, and it allows

for an examination of the specific conditions involved in meaning in life.

Meaning in Life as a Special Form of Meaning-Making

The theorists reviewed thus far have contended either that meaning is something humans need (Frankl, 1969; Maslow, 1970; Yalom, 1980) or something humans use to fulfil other needs (Stein, 1983; Wilber, 1980). Rather than endlessly debating the relative merits of either assumption, it is more productive to agree that both are partially true. The ubiquity of human meaning-making supports the view that meaning is needed, and the common rigidity and defensive of many individuals' meanings supports the conception that meaning is a process by which other needs are fulfilled. The question of concern here is how meaning in life, as a specific form of meaning-making, takes its form both as a way of fulfilling the need for meaning and as a way of fulfilling other needs.

Mitchell (1975) has effectively described how meaning in life emerges as a specific form of meaning-making in adolescence. Having spent childhood acquiring social symbols, rules and roles, the adolescent develops thinking abilities that allow for new forms of meaning. Also, newly developed formal operational abilities allow the adolescent to question previously acquired symbols, rules and roles. Since part of this questioning is directed at the

adolescent's personal worth and value, the adolescent must find answers regarding personal significance and purpose. An important concept: The previously held beliefs about significance and worth that satisfied the concrete-thinking child are not sufficient for the formal-thinking adolescent. Rather than feeling significant and worthwhile merely through personal action and feedback from others, the adolescent must also be able to convincingly conceptualize personal worth and value. Cognition thus becomes the mediator between action and experience during adolescence. In essence, the adolescent requires personal significance to be conscious and explicit rather than only experiential. Feeling worthwhile is no longer sufficient; the adolescent must also attain some cognitive verification of personal worthwhileness.

The normal adolescent needs to hold a conscious conceptualization of meaning and significance. However, the fact that this conceptualization is conscious does not imply that it is under full conscious control. The meaning system that the adolescent creates is influenced by unconscious or dimly conscious needs and personal traits, the nature of which will be described in the next chapter. For present purposes, the significant point is that the adolescent does not merely choose an appropriate conceptualization of meaning and become committed to it.

The motivation behind the adolescent's quest for meaning merits careful examination. Perhaps the most outspoken theorist on meaning in life, Frankl (1966, 1969), maintained that meaning in life is an outer-directed phenomenon that, when fulfilled, promotes self-transcendence. By directing energy towards something other than the self, the person who possesses meaning is fulfilling a request of the world and thereby is also transcending the restricting needs of the self. Frankl's conception of meaning in life, although widely supported, is ill-conceived, and the inadequacy of the conception is best illuminated by an examination of adolescent meaning. Adolescents create a sense of conceptual significance and meaning because (a) they are capable of doing so, and (b) because this ability to question personal value leads to anxiety (Mitchell, 1975). The average adolescent does not create personal meaning for the sake of fulfilling a societal need, rather, the average adolescent creates personal meaning to fulfil a personal need: i.e., the reduction of anxiety brought about by the developmental stressor of new cognitive capabilities. To expect the adolescent to fulfil the needs of others and thereby self-transcend is to expect too much. The self cannot be transcended until the self is solidified, and this solidification cannot occur at the very time when the

adolescent is grappling with forming a personal identity (Erikson, 1963).

Kalmar (1982) studied a small group of adolescents' essays on their life meanings, and found that the "most outstanding issue expressed in these essays was the desire to search for and find personal unique identity, with unique characteristics, values and goals" (p. 77). What the adolescent can do, and perhaps should do, is create a conceptualization of life's coherence and significance in such a manner that identity formation is given direction and stability. Meaning in life can be used to enhance identity at this stage, but it is not used to transcend identity. Only once the individual's sense of identity is well established will the individual be in a position to look outward toward the needs of the world and transcend personal needs. The adolescent will fulfil needs of the world as he or she creates identity and meaning, but this occurs because of the needs of the adolescent more than because of the needs of the world.

The type of meaning in life described by Frankl (e.g., 1969) is a developmental phenomenon that occurs later in life. Once the adolescent has formed an identity, conceptually established personal worth, arrived at a concept of personal significance and established a sense of life coherence, then may the needs of others become a

significant motivating force. However, this process occurs very gradually. Other developmental tasks face the individual after adolescence. In Erikson's (1963) model, for example, the individual must contend with the issue of "intimacy vs. isolation" after identity is substantially formed. Again, this task occurs because of personal need. What to Frankl might appear to be the fulfilment of the "will to meaning" through love in early adulthood would be interpreted by Erikson as the individual's need to feel intimacy, belonging and love. This motivational difference is significant because different motivations result in different behaviours. The individual in a relationship predominantly because of personal need is less likely to accurately see the other for who he or she is, more likely to be possessive and jealous, less likely to tolerate change within the other, and more likely to abandon the other when personal needs are not being fulfilled (Maslow, 1970).

The conception of meaning in life espoused by theorists such as Frankl (e.g., 1969) and Maslow (1970), as other-directed, "altruistic," and self-transcendent is probably rare and most likely occurs most often in middle and late adulthood when personal needs have been fulfilled.

Researchers have neglected to investigate the developmental transitions from self-centred to other-centred meanings. Hedlund's (1987) doctoral dissertation is one of

the few studies that has attended to the motivational and directional components of individuals' meanings. Hedlund's qualitative study of written biographical material of sixty adults (22 to 78 year olds) indicated that:

> 1. The content of one's childhood experiences are related to the content of one's adult meaning-in-life.
> 2. The initial formulation of the construct of meaning-in-life occurs between early adolescence and young adulthood.
> 3. The earliest form that meaning-in-life takes is that of a meaning-in-life focused on issues of personal development.
> 4. Once issues of personal development have been resolved, meaning-in-life remains stable.
> 5. With increasing age, the content of meaning-in-life gravitates toward sources which are external to the individual. (p. 92)

Hedlund's work goes beyond an examination of the structural elements of meaning. The bulk of research on meaning in life has not investigated the processes of meaning-making but rather, has examined the types of phenomena that individuals find meaningful (DeVogler & Ebersole, 1980, 1981, 1983; DeVogler-Ebersole & Ebersole, 1985; Ebersole & DeVogler, 1981; Harlow, 1980; McCarthy, 1983) or the differences between indiv. als who possess varying

strengths of meaningfulness (Bolt, 1975; Crumbaugh, 1968, 1977; Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1963, 1964; Crumbaugh, Raphael & Shrader, 1970; Eisner, 1978; Laufer, Laufer & Laufer, 1981; Meier & Edwards, 1974; Morris & Morris, 1978; Padelford, 1974; Phillips, 1980; Ormond, 1973; Reker & Cousins, 1979; Soderstrom, 1978). Although research of this nature is important, it is equally important to identify how individuals create meaning in life and how the processes used to create meaning change with development. Otherwise, we hold a static view of meaning-making that understands all meanings generated via the same dynamics.

In a series of studies, DeVogler and Ebersole (DeVogler & Ebersole, 1980, 1981, 1983; DeVogler-Ebersole & Ebersole, 1985; Ebersole & DeVogler, 1981) examined written protocols of individuals' meaning in life. Their primary purpose was to determine the types of meanings held by individuals (e.g., meaning in work, family, health). Subjects were simply asked to write about that which gave them most meaning in life, thus subjects were free to interpret "meaning in life" within their own framework. One interesting finding was the extent to which some subjects' descriptions of meaning in life differed from Frankl's (e.g., 1969) and Maslow's (e.g., 1970) understanding of meaning in life. Rather than an other-directed mission, calling or cause, many subjects' meanings were <u>self-centred</u>

and need-based. For example, the following excerpt is taken from a response to DeVogler and Ebersole's question:

> My family is an important meaning in my life. It is they that comfort me when I'm down, share my successes and failures with me, provide companionship and help me with my problems. It is with their help and guidance that I keep a reasonable balance in my life between work and play. They also are responsible for providing some of the challenges in my life that help me grow. (1981, p. 89, emphases added)

The above quotation well illustrates the response expected from a person experiencing Maslow's "love and belongingness" needs if queried, "How is the greatest need in your life satisfied?" The italicized words and phrases indicate that this individual is not satisfying a need of the world (i.e., the needs of his family); rather, his family is satisfying his personal needs for comfort, companionship and guidance (i.e., love and belonging).

Although it could be argued that this individual does not possess authentic meaning in life, it seems equally reasonable to consider that there are levels of meaning in life, and that these levels are characterized by a progression from self-centredness to other-centredness. Given the human propensity to create meaning, behaviour directed toward need- ification is experienced as

meaningful as other-directed meaning in life. Using Erikson's stages of developmental tasks, it is possible that individuals successively find meaning in forming their identity, establishing intimacy, resolving generativity issues and establishing integrity. There is no a priori reason to assume that the strength or intensity of the various meanings found in these tasks will vary; however, these various meanings will obviously result in different behaviours.

From a therapeutic standpoint, the distinctions between the processes involved in developmentally different meanings are perhaps more important than the issue of meaningfulness itself. For example, Frankl's (1969) school of logotherapy advocates the importance of helping clients find and fulfil personal meaning. Thus, a client experiencing existence as meaningless is encouraged to find meaning in his or her current life situations. The client's meaninglessness, however, may be only a by-product of inadequate need-fulfilment. Consequently, therapy will be more effective by making needs or developmental tasks the focus of attention rather than meaning in life. The former focus emphasizes self-fulfilment rather than self-transcendence, and it may be important to fulfil the needs of the self before attempting to transcend the self. Encouraging self-transcendence prior to the de lopment of a stable self may

be harmful to clients.

This section has examined some of the connections between meaning in life and language, and it has addressed the importance of examining the processes of making meaning in life within a developmental perspective. In the following section, several tentative hypotheses are put forth regarding the development of meaning in life, some of which have already been alluded to. The hypotheses are not integrated within a unified conceptual framework; rather, they refer to issues that have received little attention or have not been explicitly addressed. It is hoped that these hypotheses will stimulate theorists and researchers to adopt a process-oriented and developmental approach to investigate meaning in life.

Hypotheses Regarding the Development of Meaning in Life

1. Chosen meanings occur within social, environmental, biological and personological restrictions. The potential meanings available to individuals are infinite but bounded. There are a infinite number of choices available to an individual seeking meaning in life, but the process of choosing is bound by structural factors outside of individual control. The influence of these structural components will become clear in the next chapter, but for the present the significant point is that the process of creating meaning changes as the structural influences on the

person change.

2a. The restrictions on available meanings decrease with normal development. The development of cognition, personality, emotion, and morality are some of the influences on the process of making meaning. As each of these developmental aspects become more differentiated and integrated, the individual is in a more adequate position to choose meaning in life, or any other meaning. For example, an individual who, within Maslow's model, is constrained by needs for security will experience less meaning-options than an individual whose security, love and esteem needs have been adequately satisfied.

2b. As the external restrictions on meaning-making lessen, individuals become increasingly teleonomic. This hypothesis derives from 2a. With increased cognitive power, emotional stability and need gratification, individuals become increasingly able to identify and select meaning in life. Unlike the child who, by limitations of ability, is restricted to the meanings of culture, developing adults become increasingly able to forge private meanings and direct their own destinies.

3. Creating meaning in life influences, and is influenced by, other developmental processes. This chapter and the next illustrate how developmental processes influence the processes involved in making meaning in life.

It seems theoretically consistent that the way individuals create meaning also influences other developmental processes. Research has demonstrated that meaning in life may be a change agent in and of itself, leading to improved psychological health, emotional stability and perceived well-being (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964; Crumbaugh, Raphael & Shrader, 1970; Kotchen, 1960; Laufer, Laufer, & Laufer, 1981; Phillips, 1980; Ormond, 1973; Yalom, 1980). On the other hand, creating meaning in life may also be developmentally restricting. For example, a youth with an underdeveloped sense of identity joins a religious cult -- his or her motivation may be experienced as the desire to serve God or the master of the cult; however, the youth's further development may actually require the fulfillment of needs for belonging, love and worth. These needs may be the true motivating force behind joining the cult. If the cult does not satisfy these needs, the youth's devotion to his or her perceived meaning will prevent him or her from seeking satisfaction elsewhere. The lack of need-gratification thus results in developmental arrest.

4. Some meanings are more easily sustained than others: some meanings make better use of social, environmental, biological and personological boundaries or restrictions. Certain meanings may be more easily maintained, developed and held without conflict than others.

This hypothesis is perhaps most clearly exemplified in the area of work. Work can be a significant target for meaningfulness, but the ability to find meaning in work depends largely on the ability to find work that is suited to one's values, beliefs and interests. In a competitive labour market, or in an economically depressed environment, making meaning with a specific form of work may be impossible.

5. Perceived meaningfulness can be a function of progress towards designated goals. Battista and Almond (1973) found that the degree to which individuals find their lives meaningful is a function of:

> (1) Current absolute goal-position relative to life-goal-position.
>
> (2) Current rate of progress toward life-goal.
>
> (3) Comparison of present goal-position and rate of progress with previous goal-positions and rates of progress.
>
> (4) Goal-position at present relative to predicted goal-position for the present at past times.
>
> (5) Anticipated goal-position and rates of change in the future.
>
> (6) The direct effect of levels of positive life regard [i.e., meaningfulness] in the past. (pp. 421-422)

Perceptions of progress toward the object of one's meaning

and past experience with fulfilling one's meaning are significant contributors to meaning-making.

6a. The object of meaning becomes increasingly other-centred and decreasingly self-centred with normal development. This hypothesis was discussed in detail earlier and was supported by Hedlund's (1987) cross-sectional research on meaning in life. Early meanings are concerned primarily with issues of personal development and need; later meanings are more likely to focus on the needs of others. Thus, the conception of meaning in life as a task presented to an individual by the world (Frankl, 1969) is less likely to occur in adolescence and early adulthood than in middle and late adulthood.

6b. Meaning in life can be found in the needs of the world or in personal needs and issues. As a corollary to #6a, it seems apparent that the pursuit of personal needs or the resolution of developmental tasks can be perceived as meaningful. In Maslow's words, "striving for something one lacks inevitably makes one feel that life has a meaning and that life is worthwhile" (1984, p. 38).

6c. Meaninglessness may occur when personal needs are not gratified. When meaning is found in "striving for something one lacks," it is likely that a lack of progress in fulfilling one's needs will result in a sense of meaninglessness. As Battista and Almond (1973) determined,

progress towards one's goals is a precursor to a sense of meaningfulness.

Discussion

This chapter has reviewed and examined conceptions of the processes by which we make meaning. The creation of meaning is not a simple process of evaluating options and selecting from alternatives. Relatively little theoretical and empirical work has examined the processes of meaning, but it appears likely that unconscious processes play an important role in the formation of meaning and, particularly in the early years, one's available meanings are restricted by personal ability, personal needs and societal pressure. These restrictions lessen with developmental progress, but the process of making meaning in life always remains constrained by uncontrollable internal and external factors. Perhaps most important from a developmental perspective is how the creation of meaning in life is strongly influenced by other developmental needs. The earliest forms of meaning in life are self-centred rather than other-centred, but they are therefore no less significant or meaningful. With development, the ability and desire to adopt other-centred meanings increases, and it is important for therapists to understand that "selfish" meanings are not necessarily harmful or inauthentic. However, it is also important for practitioners to attend to underlying processes that may

influence an individual's experience of meaninglessness. Meaninglessness may merely be a symptom of some other developmental deficit.

A significant portion of this chapter referred to factors that influence meaning-making processes. These factors, referred to here as the structural components of meaning-making, include personality characteristics, genetic endowment, environmental conditions, previous experiences, other aspects of development, and socioeconomic considerations. Each structural component influences when and how the processes of meaning-making occur, and thus it is imperative to account for them in a theory of meaning in life. The next chapter focuses on the structural components of meaning in life, and attempts to identify some of their important influences. It is this area that has received the most research attention.

CHAPTER VI

THE STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS OF MAKING MEANING

The discussion in the previous chapter made frequent references to the "structural" components of meaning-making. "Structure" is a constraining element within the context of meaning-making that is not immediately within the meaning-maker's control. Thus, genetic endowment, environmental conditions, past experience, level of cognition, personal needs, and personality characteristics are structural components that influence the meaning-making process. Structural components can be viewed as the tools used in the process of making meaning.

In this chapter, several structural elements of meaning-making are analyzed. The majority of research on meaning in life has addressed the structures of meaning and thus, the following discussion is less speculative than the discussions in previous chapters. However, much of the research has focused on relatively minor structural elements, thereby leaving unexplained structural elements of considerable import. This chapter attempts to address this imbalance in order to provide alternative conceptualizations of the structural components of meaning in life, and to suggest directions for future research.

The Influence of Cognition on Meaning in Life

Mitchell (1975) is one of the few theorists to have explicitly analyzed the effect of cognition (where "cognition" refers to types of thought processes (cf. Piaget, 1970) rather than intelligence) on meaning in life. Mitchell argued that the development of formal operational cognition is a prerequisite to personal conceptualizations of meaning in life. Although the concrete operational thinker experiences meaningfulness through actions and experiences, only the formal operational thinker possesses the abilities to conceive of his or her life as a whole, analyze the manner in which his or her life coheres with other lives, conceptualize relative worthwhileness, and envision absolute meaninglessness. The formal operational thinker is capable of conceiving the meaning of life, whereas the concrete thinker is capable only of conceiving the meaning of specific events and experiences.

Mitchell's (1975) contention is important because it provides a developmental perspective to the study of meaning-making, and it provides a basis for questioning Frankl's (1969) claim that all individuals are capable of possessing meaning in life. By examining the differences between concrete and formal thinkers' meaning-making, Mitchell opened the door to comparisons of meaning-making at various cognitive levels. Recent research suggests that

forms of cognition exist that are more inclusive, integrated and differentiated than formal operations (Arlin, 1984; Armon, 1984; Basseches, 1980, 1984; Benack, 1984; Commons, Richards & Kuhn, 1982; Fischer, Hand & Russell, 1984; Koplowitz, 1984; Kramer, 1983; Kramer & Woodruff, 1986; Labouvie-Vief, 1980, 1982, 1984; Richards & Commons, 1984; Riegel, 1973; Sinnott, 1984; Sternberg, 1984; Wilber, 1977, 1980). These forms of cognition are called "postformal operations" because they emerge after formal operations in a developmental sequence. In the following paragraphs, the influences of postformal operations on meaning-making will be addressed.

Frankl's (1969) argument for the universality of meaning in life is weakened by evidence that formal thinkers create qualitatively different meanings than concrete thinkers. Frankl held that meaning in life is independent of ability and therefore, that therapists should help all clients find meaning in life. Not all clients may benefit from this process if formal operational thought is necessary to conceptualize meaning in life. Concrete operational thinkers, many of whom are adults (cf. Arlin, 1984), may not need to arrive at a conceptualization of life's meaning and further, they may be confused and discouraged in the attempt to do so.

The existence of levels of cognition beyond formal

operations is significant to the study of meaning in life. Cognition is a tool used by the process of meaning-making and thus, changes in cognition modify the meaning-making process. The sensorimotor and preoperational thinkers are minimally concerned with meaning in life; rather, they are involved in acquiring the symbolic base that will eventually be used as a tool in creating meaning in life. Concrete operational thinkers do not address personal meaning in a global and abstract sense; rather, their energy is devoted to meanings related to social rules and roles. The formal thinker becomes concerned with personal meaning because the ability to abstract allows the individual to question all previously acquired meanings. These queries naturally lead to the questioning of personal meaning, worth and value. The recency and uncertainty of conceptualizations of postformal operations prevent us from clearly understanding how postformal thinkers grapple with meaning, but if the differences between postformal operations and formal operations result in as many manifestations as the differences between formal and concrete operations, the effect of postformal cognition on meaning is well worth exploring.

Conceptualizations of postformal cognition are varied. However, Sinnott (1984) noted four main points that are common to most concepti...s: "1. the acceptance of

relativism; 2. the acceptance of contradiction [dialectical thinking]; 3. the integration of frames of reference; 4. pragmatism" (p. 320). Theorists have chosen different labels for postformal operations and some have postulated the existence of several levels of cognition beyond formal operations. For example, Commons, Richards and Coon (1982) and Richards and Commons (1984) described three stages beyond formal operations: systematic operations, metasystematic operations and cross-paradigmatic operations. Systematic operations involve operations on systems, allowing the individual to operate on all the elements of a system simultaneously. These operations are similar to those proposed by Sternberg (1984), who labelled them "third-order operations." Metasystematic operations involve operations across systems. The metasystematic thinker is capable of making comparisons between different systems. The pinnacle of metasystematic operations is reached when the individual can construct "a complete class of relations between a class of systems (a system of systems)" (Richards & Commons, 1984, p. 97). Finally, cross-paradigmatic operations establish relations between families of systems.

The specific details of various forms of postformal operations are not of major importance here. It is important, however, to analyze how thought that is primarily relativistic, dialectical and contextual may produce

different meaning-making than logical, linear and abstract thought. Wilber's (1977, 1980, 1983) model of personality development serves as a starting point for this exploration. Wilber understood formal operations to be characteristic of the "late ego" period of development, in which the individual's primary pursuit of unity is through conceptualization. The power of formal thinking to solve problems (e.g., through science) impels the self to identify with cognition and thus minimize its identification with the body. The self is experienced as located in the head, and the body is understood to be a vehicle under the cognitive self's control. With the understanding that cognition is not omnipotent (see Wilber (1980) for the mechanics of this process), the self identifies with both the head and the body; the self no longer operates on the body but <u>is</u> the body. To Wilber, this is the point when meaning in life becomes a primary motivating force. The self no longer operates within a dualistic mind/body perspective, but now faces the dualism of being vs. non-being. The organism is unified at this stage and understands itself to be separate from the environment. The finiteness of this separate existence leads the self to search for meaning and thus bring value to an otherwise stark existence.

With the development of higher forms of cognition, the self vs. environment opposition created by formal thinking

begins to weaken. Relativistic, contextual and dialectical thought enable individuals to understand that the world is a process in which "parts" and "whole" are separated only conceptually. Postformal thinkers begin to understand that individuals are not separate from each other or from the environment. They understand that all things are interconnected and that a change to a part of a system changes the entire system. The apparent separations are due to formal conceptualizations which, although useful, represent reality rather than are reality. Formal operations mentally fragment a unified reality; postformal operations begin to unify the fragmented parts. Thus, the postformal thinker is not as concerned about the being/non-being duality that created anxiety in the formal thinker. The postformal thinker begins to understand "being vs. non-being" as a deceptive dichotomy created by formal categorizations (the postformal thinker only begins this process -- its full embodiment requires more than cognition (cf. Wilber, 1980)).

The conceptualizations that arise from postformal thought reduce the anxiety-based need to find meaning in life. The postformal thinker is able to see beyond separate existence and conceptualize the relationships between persons and events. The cognitive abilities of the postformal thinker result in changes in the meaning-making

process: rather than striving to find meaning and thus alleviate anxiety, the individual understands that meaning is created for pragmatic purposes; rather than dogmatically clinging to a mission or cause, the individual is able to see his or her meaning in context from various perspectives, and; rather than devoting life to his or her meaning, the individual is able to balance activities in an integrated fashion. Paradoxically, then, the postformal thinker's ability to detach from fixed meanings allows him or her to more effectively fulfil created meanings.

Batson, Beker and Clark (1973) coined a phrase for non-rigid commitment that applies here -- "commitment without ideology." The postformal thinker is fully committed to chosen meanings, but the lack of rigid conceptualizations about chosen meanings allows for less personal defensiveness and greater flexibility in pursuing meaning. For example, Batson et al. compared individuals whose faith in Christianity was based in believing its complete ideology with individuals who were committed to core Christian principles but questioned overall Christian ideology. Batson found that the questioning individuals who possessed "commitment without ideology" behaved in closer harmony with Christian principles than those who were committed and who believed in the ideology. Thus, "commitment without ideology" led to greater fu. lment of Christian meanings

than commitment to ideology.

The above description is not intended to represent the final word on the influence of cognition on meaning in life. Rather, the discussion is presented to illustrate that cognition is a structure that profoundly influences meaning-making processes. Therapeutic schools (e.g., logotherapy) that minimize these influences underplay important differences between clients.

The Influences of Experience and Personality Factors on Meaning in Life

Personal experiences, characteristics, and defenses each play a role in the formation of meaning. These "person-variables" have been largely ignored by theorists (e.g., Frankl, 1969) who understand meaning in life to be free of the constraints of personality (except in the case of pathology), but they have received attention from researchers of meaning in life. The influence of person-variables on meaning in life is an important area of inquiry because it reflects on the issue of the self-transcendence of meaning. Frankl's (e.g., 1969) claim that meaning is self-transcendent refers to the assumption that meaning in life operates beyond the needs and characteristics of the self; meaning is directed toward objects beyond the self.

If creating meaning in life is understood as an act of self-transcendence, it would logically follow that person-

variables minimally effect the construction of meaning. On the other hand, if forming meaning in life is a self-fulfilling process, person-variables should be a strong determinant of how meaning is formed. Further, a developmental view of meaning would predict that the influence of personality on meaning to change with developmental transformations. Research on this topic has not systematically addressed these issues, but there may be sufficient evidence to permit some educated speculations on this topic. This section reviews research on person-variables and meaning and draws some implications to help direct future research.

The Purpose in Life Test

Meaning in life began to be studied empirically with Crumbaugh and Maholick's (1964) development of the "Purpose in Life (PIL) Test." Equating "meaning in life" and "purpose in life," Crumbaugh and Maholick designed the PIL test to measure relative strengths of individuals' meanings. The PIL test has since been the instrument of choice for most researchers of meaning in life. However, the test possesses serious psychometric problems. Yalom (1980) criticised the PIL test for blending distinct concepts (e.g., meaning in life, fear of death, freedom), being loaded in social desirability ("a correlation coefficient of .57 is reported with the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability

scale" (p. 456)), being highly culture-biased (e.g., ghetto residents interpret items differently than do graduate students) and being highly value-laden (e.g., the Protestant work ethic underlies most of the items). Given these problems, I provide the reader with the cautionary note of Yalom's:

> These criticisms are substantial, indeed devastating, and have never been satisfactorily answered by researchers using the PIL; they all make it difficult for one to have a high level of confidence in the instrument. Still, it is the only game in town, the only psychological instrument that has been used widely to study meaninglessness in a systematic manner. Keeping these reservations in mind, let me consider some of the research findings. (p. 457)

Unless otherwise specified, studies referred to in the remainder of the chapter have used the PIL test to measure "meaning" or "purpose in life."

Meaning and Pathology

Meaning in life has been shown to decrease with an increase in certain forms of pathology. Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964) found that psychiatric patients and out-patients possessed less meaning in life than non-patient groups. Alcoholics (Crumbaugh, 1968, 1971), psychotics (Crumbaugh, 1968), drug abusers (Padelford, 1974), sexually

frustrated individuals (Sallee & Casciani, 1967) and delinquent adolescents (Familetti, 1975) have been found to possess less meaning in life than normal individuals. The meaninglessness found in abnormal populations does not appear to be directly due to the pathology, however: Meaning and meaninglessness are the poles of a relatively independent personality variable (Yalom, 1980). Meaninglessness can thus be a condition of normal populations, but it is also a symptom of pathology.

The studies cited above are correlational and do not specify causal factors between pathology and meaning in life. Two studies (Harlow, Newcomb & Bentler, 1986; Newcomb & Harlow, 1986), however, have attempted to identify the sequence of the relationship between abnormality and meaninglessness. Harlow et al. used confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation procedures to determine the sequential paths between (a) depression and self-derogation, (b) meaninglessness, (c) suicide ideation and (d) drug use. They found that depression and self-derogation, two indicators of psychic discomfort, were precursors to meaninglessness for both male and female adolescents. Harlow et al. also found that in response to meaninglessness, young women were more likely to respond with substance use whereas young men were more likely to react with suicide ideation. A sequential path was thus

identified: psychic discomfort-meaninglessness-substance use (women)/suicide ideation (men). However, when negative self-perceptions did not result in meaninglessness, young women were inclined to turn to suicide ideation and young men tended to engage in drug use. The sequence therefore was psychic discomfort-substance use (men)/suicide ideation (women). Thus, meaninglessness appears to mediate between psychic discomfort and self-destructive symptoms, and the effects of mediation are different for each gender.

Newcomb and Harlow (1986) conducted a study similar to Harlow et al.'s (1986) in which uncontrollable stressful events, perceived loss of control, meaninglessness and substance use were examined. Newcomb and Harlow found that adolescents who experienced aversive and inescapable life events tend to experience a loss of personal control. Loss of control led to feelings of meaninglessness which, in turn, increased the probability of substance use. When stressful events do not result in loss of control, however, meaninglessness is less likely to ensue.

The research by Harlow et al. (1986) and Newcomb and Harlow (1986) is significant because it supports theorists such as Frankl (e.g., 1984) and Maddi (e.g., 1967) in their claim that meaninglessness is a precursor to pathological symptoms rather than a result of pathological conditions. Frankl and Maddi have lc claimed that meaninglessness is

not merely a symptom of pathology, but they have also, as a consequence of their theoretical posture, implied from this that meaninglessness is minimally influenced by personality variables. In the following section, evidence that indicates that meaning and meaninglessness can be both results and causes of personality factors is reviewed.

Meaning and Person-Variables

To understand some of the effects of person-variables on meaning in life, an examination of specific personality characteristics is necessary. Although several studies have found no relationship between meaning in life and personality characteristics (e.g., Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964; Crumbaugh, Raphael & Shrader, 1970; Laufer, Laufer & Laufer, 1981), meaning in life has been found to correlate positively with self-confidence (Crumbaugh et al., 1970, Yarnell, 1971), defensiveness (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964), dogmatism (Morris & Morris, 1978 (PIL test not used)), need for power (Morris & Morris, 1978 (PIL test not used)), intrinsic religious orientation (Bolt, 1975), internal locus of control (Eisner, 1978; Phillips, 1980; Yarnell, 1971), self-actualization (Ormond, 1973), and negatively with anxiety (Crumbaugh et al., 1970), depression (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964), feelings of hopelessness (Grygielski, Januszewska, Januszewska, Juros & Oles, 1984) and closemindedness (Ormond, 1973) (s Table 2 for a tabular

presentation of these relationships). This list of studies highlights the lack of systematic investigation in the area of meaning in life and person-variables. Each group of researchers has studied variables of idiosyncratic interest without a strong attempt to find a global view of the relationship between meaning and person-variables.

Table 2

Empirical Relationships between Meaning in Life and Person-Variables

Positively Correlated with Meaning in Life	Negatively Correlated with Meaning in Life
Self-confidence	Anxiety
Defensiveness	Depression
Dogmatism	Hopelessness
Need for Power	Closemindedness
Intrinsic Religious Orientation	
Internal Locus of Control	
Self-Actualization	

The lack of systematic [illegible] replicated research renders

it difficult to arrive at a single conception of meaning that accounts for the influence of person-variables on meaning in life. The array of relationships indicate that the processes of creating meaning in life do not occur in isolation of constraints of personality (bearing in mind the caution that each of the studies cited used correlational methods). Frankl's claim that meaning can be found under all life conditions is thus undermined.

The ability to create meaning, the type of meaning that is created and the intensity of life meaning are influenced by person-variables. The process of creating meaning, although allowing the individual an infinite array of meanings to create, is thus bounded and constrained by personality. Working from the assumption that personality factors are strongly influenced by experience (particularly early experience), meaning-making processes are constrained by life experience. Recently, a qualitative study by Hedlund (1987) supported this contention. Hedlund studied extensive autobiographical data of adults of varying ages and found that adults' meanings were often strongly tied to pre-adolescent experiences.

> The factors that caused particular seeds to take on special importance varied.... A now 72 year old man remembers at age three seeing his father riding away on his horse and forgetting t say goodbye. He saw this

> as typifying his father's inability to provide for the needs of his family. This was reported as the source of the participant's need to orient his life toward his career in order to be different from his father. (p. 72)

Hedlund (1987) found that early experience profoundly influences adult meaning in very specific ways. Hedlund also found that early experience exerts a more general influence on meaning in life in adulthood. Individuals whose early experiences were negative tended to focus their meanings on personal development; these individuals were interested in solidifying their identities and pursuing their potentials. Individuals whose early experiences were positive were more inclined to create meaning through relationships with others or through beliefs in particular worldviews.

The apparently profound influence of experience and person-variables on meaning merits extensive and systematic study. Therapists choosing to help individuals enhance and create meaning must look beyond <u>what</u> is meaningful to a client to <u>why</u> something is meaningful to a client. The systematic enhancement of current client meanings may serve only to entrench characteristics and self-perceptions that are unhealthy or are developmentally restricting. Individuals pursuing meanings based on early experience may

ignore other possible meanings that could be more fulfilling, exciting and liberating.

The systematic study of the structural elements of meaning-making would illuminate the interplay between experience, needs, defenses, pathology, cognition and personality traits with respect to meaning. An understanding of these relationships would, in turn, assist in the conceptualization of the development of meaning. The making of meaning changes as the meaning-making tools change: as needs change, meanings will change; as defenses change, meanings will change; as cognition changes, meanings will change.

As in the discussion of cognition, the concepts above are not intended to fully delineate how personality and experience influence meaning. The important concern is that these factors constraint meaning-making, and that they therefore cannot be ignored in an examination of meaning in life.

Meaning and Environmental Constraints

One of the paramount constraints on the processes of meaning-making is the individual's environment. Meanings cannot be equally fulfilled in radically different environments. Cultural expectations, socioeconomic conditions and specific life events serve to constrain the individual's ability to creat and fulfil meaning. Frankl's

(e.g., 1984) examples of concentration camp prisoners' meanings illustrate the influence of environment on meaning. Prisoners had virtually no control over their environment or their actions within the environment, and thus were forced to create meaning through attitudinal values. The concentration camp is an extreme case of environmental influence on meaning. However, a case can be presented that all meanings are similarly constrained by the environment, if to a much lesser extent, and thus all meanings involve attitudinal values.

The construction of meaningful work (creative values) includes attitudinal values. Creating meaning through work is not simply a matter of choosing one's "mission" or "calling" and pursuing it; one chooses work within the context of the constraints of the labour market and life circumstances. Within those constraints, the individual adopts an attitude that allows work to be personally meaningful. Few of us have the capacity of someone such as Einstein who, through brilliance as well as effort, was able to fulfil work values with minimal constraints. Most of us must compromise, choosing work that only partially fulfils our "calling." In a work setting in which only a few creative values can be fulfilled, one makes the choice to conceive of work as meaningful or meaningless. The artist whose dream it is to communicate a particular vision of

reality may find that fulfilling this dream is economically unworkable; taking on work as a commercial artist in order to pay the bills may be perceived as artistic prostitution. However, neither path possesses inherent meaning. The artist may find "true art" meaningful only because of cultural expectations of the artistic community that art is only worthy when it is a creative act produced only for the act itself. However, meaning can be created in the work setting if the artist chooses to perceive commercial art as a challenging forum in which to communicate a unique vision. The artist's attitude plays a large role in the construction of meaning.

Fulfilling meaning through love or beauty (experiential values) also requires that fulfilling experiences are available to an individual. Impoverished environments leave little room for experiential meanings. Again, it is the attitude of the individual that will allow for the creation of meaning in constrained situations. One does not simply find an ideal partner to reactively love. Love is proactive in that it demands choices and occasional compromises. People speak of "finding" the "perfect" partner as if the partner was made just for them, and it is true that partners are found rather than made. However, finding a partner entails meeting someone who fulfils criteria that were created, not found, by the indivic ... It is the

conformation of the partner with these criteria that makes the relationship workable. It is rare that a partner will fulfil all of an individual's criteria, and thus choices must be made regarding the priority and importance of the criteria. It is these choices that will help to make a partner ideal or undesirable.

Discussion

The processes of meaning-making are limited and partially directed by structural elements of the person and the environment. Meanings are chosen, but they are not freely chosen; personality characteristics, needs, cognitive abilities, experiences and environmental conditions place restrictions on fulfilling meanings. Some individuals are in better positions to find fulfilling meanings than others.

This chapter did not specify the relationships between meaning processes and structures. The intent here was to demonstrate that: meaning-making processes are influenced by structural elements of the person and environment, thereby placing in question Frankl's (e.g., 1984) claim of the universality of meaning-making; meaning-making processes change as these structural elements change, and thus a developmental perspective of meaning is needed, and; meaning-making is not always a self-transcendent process. Meaning in life takes different forms at different times. Although Frankl's (1960, 1969, 1984) repeated claim that

meaning is self-transcendent holds true at certain levels of development, it is clear that individuals make meaning of so-called "selfish" concerns such as satisfying personal needs or bolstering personal defenses. Clearly, not all meanings are the same in this regard.

CHAPTER VII

THE OUTCOMES OF MEANING-MAKING

Thus far in this thesis the experiences of meaningfulness and meaninglessness, the driving forces behind the quest for meaning, have not been analyzed in detail. The discussion has been predominantly theoretical and has ignored the range of powerful experiences and emotions associated with meaning in life. When individuals speak of "having meaning in life," they usually are not speaking of meaning as a psychological construct created by their own mental processes under the restrictions of structural elements of their existence. Rather, they are giving a label to a perhaps ineffable experience of fulfilment, worth and value, an experience sufficiently prepotent to override "lower" concerns such as hunger, safety or esteem.

This experience, or set of experiences, is one of two topics of concern in this chapter. The nature of the experience of meaning forces the tone of this chapter to be somewhat different from the others; the rather "cold" impartiality of theoretical statements does not justly serve the experience of meaning in life. However, I hope that by being true to the experiences associated with meaning, by not diminishing their human worth, and by not attempting to

reduce all such experiences to "lower" forms, an understanding of the experience of meaningfulness will emerge that avoids the "romantic" conceptions of meaningfulness currently being expounded by theorists in the area.

The second purpose of this chapter is to examine other outcomes of meaning-making processes. Although the experience of meaningfulness may be the goal of the quest for meaning, other products emerge from creating meaning. Theorists have claimed that the possession of meaning in life results in positive outcomes such as self-transcendence, stress reduction, self-actualization and psychological health. The positive effects of meaning have been used to defend therapies that promote the development of meaning in life. However, meaning in life may produce negative or unhealthy outcomes as well. Negative outcomes of meaning-making occur in the defensive use of meaning, and include need-fixation and developmental delay.

The Experience of Meaning

Describing the experience of meaning is somewhat akin to describing the taste of an apple; it serves as a poor substitute for the actual experience. Perhaps this is one reason researchers examine the experience of meaning from the perspective of its opposite, the experience of meaninglessness. Meaninglessness is easier to describe. To

give the reader a sense of the experiences of meaning and meaninglessness, several quotations are cited below (quotations not followed by a citation are taken from data from an unpublished study I conducted in 1987) from which themes are extracted. The excerpts are chosen to illustrate that meaning in life produces a variety of experiences related to personal satisfaction.

Crumbaugh (1977) analyzed meaning in life and found the experience to be closely related to the quality of relationships with others:

> Finding a real meaning and purpose in life is not a matter of accumulating "things," but rather of performing some task that causes one to gain some type of feedback, real or imagined, now or in the future, of appreciation, commendation and acceptance from one's fellows. (p. 901)

Crumbaugh (1977) understood the outcomes of meaning-making to be love and esteem from others. Feelings of acceptance and worth form the experience of meaning. Although theorists such as Frankl argued against these presumably "selfish" experiences arising from meaningfulness, it appears that individuals often equate the experience of meaningfulness with the experiences of personal value and belonging. Consider the following:

> The thing that gives ning to my life is the gospel

> of Jesus Christ.... The main ways my beliefs help me is through increased self-worth and gratitude.... I feel loved and worthwhile because I know I am a Daughter of God.

> The acquisition of love and the giving of love provide me with the greatest meaning in life. I like to feel that I belong somewhere special with certain special people, be they friends or family. This gives me a sense of worth and purpose.

> The thing that gives me greatest meaning in life is love and to be loved.... To be loved becomes a reassurance and help to realize that you are worth something to someone.

These excerpts indicate strong ties between feeling that life is meaningful and feeling loved, esteemed and worthy. For the individuals cited above, the experiences of being loved and feeling worthy comprise the experience of meaningfulness. This does not mean, however, that the experience of meaningfulness <u>is</u> the experience of love and worth. Other experiences are associated with meaningfulness as well.

A predominant focus of meaning is religious concerns. The variety of meanings in th realm vary widely, ranging

from the quest for spiritual oneness to more basic concerns, such as those illustrated below:

> I find that the thing which gives my greatest meaning in my life is my faith and my religion. Or, just simply my belief in God and my belief that He loves me. I have found this faith a support during the times of stress and crisis in my life.... He knows who I am and I find that thought very encouraging and supportive.

> What gives me the greatest meaning in life is God!.... I can't explain the joy and peace I have in knowing that I have God in control of my life! I don't have to worry about anything because he takes such good care of me.

These excerpts indicate needs for security, love and support. The fulfilment of these needs through religious means is intensely meaningful to these individuals. The experience of meaningfulness, however, is not restricted to the experience of need satisfaction.

Frankl (1965) maintained that the experience of meaningfulness is associated with feeling unique:

> Having such a task [a meaningful mission] makes the person irreplaceable and gives his life the value of uniqueness. (p. 12)

When an individual conceptualizes his or her life as

different from anyone else's, the individual experiences meaningfulness. Thus, the feeling of uniqueness is another component of the experience of meaningfulness.

The belief that one's life "leads to something" and makes a long-term difference in affairs of the world is also associated with the experience of meaningfulness. Individuals experience a void when their lives do not impact on their world:

> When I consider the brief span of my life, swallowed up in eternity before and behind it, the small space that I fill, or even see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces which I know not, and which know not me, I am afraid, and wonder to see myself here rather than there; for there is no reason why I should be here rather than there, now rather than then. (Pascal, 1910, p. 78).

> The question, which in my fiftieth year had brought me to the notion of suicide, was the simplest of all questions, lying in the soul of every man from the undeveloped child to the wisest sage: "What will come from what I am doing now, and may do tomorrow. What will come from my whole life?" otherwise expressed - "Why should I live? Why should I wish for anything? Why should I do any ing?" Again, in other words: "Is

there any meaning in my life which will not be destroyed by the inevitable death awaiting me?" (Tolstoy, as cited in Yalom, 1980, p. 420)

Imagine a happy group of morons who are engaged in work. They are carrying bricks in an open field. As soon as they have stacked all the bricks at one end of the field, they proceed to transport them to the opposite end. This continues without stop and everyday of every year they are busy doing the same thing. One day one of the morons stops long enough to ask himself what he is doing. He wonders what purpose there is in carrying the bricks. And from that instant on he is not quite as content with his occupation as he had been before.

I am the moron who wonders why he is carrying the bricks. (Anonymous, cited in Yalom, 1980, p. 419)

Pascal, Tolstoy and the individual who wrote the suicide note sought to determine the impact of their lives in the future. If their lives had no effect, they conceived their lives to be meaningless. But what is the <u>experience</u> which accompanies this conceptualization? Despair and anxiety are often associated with meaninglessness, whereas contentment and satisfaction form part of the experience of meaningfulness. However, there are many events that produce

despair and anxiety or contentment and satisfaction. Is the experience of meaningfulness merely comprised of being content and satisfied (however this contentment may occur -- through being loved, esteemed, unique or purposeful)? Is the experience of meaningfulness simply a more enduring sort of contentment than could be found through eating a fine meal or watching an entertaining movie?

Frankl (1960) claimed that meaning produced pleasure: "Pleasure establishes itself automatically as soon as one has fulfilled a meaning or realized a value" (p. 8), but he also maintained that the pleasure resulting from meaning was of a different order than "lower" pleasures such as the pleasure of simple need-gratification. Frankl understood the pleasure or satisfaction of meaning to be a deep and enduring pleasure that involved the whole of one's life. Below is an excerpt from a therapy session in which a woman described the meaning of her life:

> "I wished to have children and this wish has been granted to me; one boy died; the other, however, the crippled one, would have been sent to an institution if I had not taken over his care. Though he is crippled and helpless, he is after all my boy. And so I have made a fuller life possible for him; I have made a better human being out of my son." At this moment, there was an outburst of tears and, crying, she

> continued: "As for myself, I can look back peacefully on my life; for I can say my life was full of meaning, and I have tried hard to fulfill it; I have done my best - I have done the best for my son. My life was no failure!" (Frankl, 1984, p. 140)

This woman describes something more than an elemental satisfaction. Her satisfaction is comprised of emotional, conceptual, and spiritual components that combine to form an experience greater than any component in isolation. In fact, there were probably many times in her life when enormous sacrifices had to be made in order to find the global satisfaction described here. In contrast, ponder the following excerpt of another mother's meaning:

> It used to be so damned important to me for everybody else to like me -- that gave my life meaning.... For starters, I'm #1, to hell with being nice to everybody.... I no longer look to others for MY meaning.... I have a daughter, but that is not the meaning to MY life.... What gives me meaning is to do something I like, and to do it the best I possibly can...

Rather than finding satisfaction in the meaning of her life as a whole, this mother finds meaning in separate experiences; she finds satisfaction when she engages in something enjoyable and performs the task well. The two

women find meanings in different contexts, but are their experiences of meaningfulness necessarily different?

The examples above suggest that although meaning is created through many avenues, there exists a common experience or set of experiences that individuals consistently refer to as "meaningful." Being secure, loved, esteemed, worthy, supported, valued, helpful or successful are each meaningful experiences. One common thread which links these experiences is contentment or satisfaction, but obviously not all satisfying experiences are meaningful. Conversely, not all meaningful experiences are immediately satisfying.

It can be maintained that the difference between a "satisfying" experience and a "meaningful" experience is grounded in the interpretation of the event. Individuals create meanings and thus consciously or unconsciously create an opportunity to feel that an experience of satisfaction is meaningful. Thus, any satisfying experience holds the potential to be rendered meaningful by the individual. Further, unsatisfying experiences (e.g., those requiring personal sacrifice for movement toward a long-term goal) can be made meaningful when understood to contribute to long-term satisfaction. The act of creating meaning therefore requires an act of creating or sustaining satisfaction.

When an individual is unable to create meaning from an

experience, dissatisfaction ensues in the form of emptiness, anxiety or alienation. Consequently, satisfying experiences may become unsatisfying once interpreted as meaningless. "Mid-life crises" exemplify the re-interpretation of previously satisfying events in such a manner that the events become meaningless and therefore, unfulfilling. During "mid-life crises," meanings are re-evaluated. Previously meaningful work, marriages and friendships often lose their meaning during the crises and, occasionally, individuals react to this meaninglessness by disconnecting many of their links to their personal history and attempting to construct new bonds and ties. The anxiety of meaninglessness is subdued by the efforts to establish new life directions.

The satisfaction that ensues from meaning or the dissatisfaction resulting from meaninglessness are both dependent on the individual's expectation that meaning is necessary to satisfaction. Individuals who expect that meaning is found in the world experience disappointment and anxiety when they cannot "find" meaning in their world. Tolstoy's angst regarding the meaninglessness of existence resulted from his desire that life possess long-term meaning. Without the expectation of meaning, the questions over which Tolstoy anguished would either not need to be asked, or they would more closely resemble intellectual

curiosity. His desperation and anxiety reveal that Tolstoy experienced a need for meaning. For Tolstoy, mere satisfying experiences were not, unto themselves, interpreted as meaningful and, because meaning was expected, the experiences eventually became dissatisfying.

Meaning is one way to produce and enhance satisfaction. Meaning, however, is not necessary to create satisfaction. The cultural forces described in Chapter II have produced a situation in which individuals in our culture expect to find meaning and thus hinge their satisfactions on whether meaning is "found." Individuals who do not experience a need for meaning experience satisfactions as they occur, and do not rely on meaning to provide satisfaction.

Products of Meaning

The creation of meaning in life produces more than personal satisfaction. It has been argued that meaning in life (a) enhances psychological health (e.g., Antonovsky, 1987; Frankl, 1969, 1984; Yalom, 1980), (b) produces self-transcendence (e.g., Frankl, 1969, 1984), (c) contributes to self-actualization (Maslow, 1966, 1970), (d) assists in overcoming pathology (e.g., Frankl, 1969, 1984) and (e) enhances the ability to cope with stress (Antonovsky, 1987). These positive outcomes, described in detail below, have been the focus of theorists and researchers attempting to demonstrate to the psychologic community that meaning in

life is worthy of intensive study. Largely neglected in theory and research are the negative outcomes of meaning in life. In this section, both positive and negative outcomes are reviewed.

Meaning and Stress

Antonovsky (1987) argued that the ability to find meaning is one of most effective methods of coping with stress. Antonovsky's informal studies found that individuals leading meaningful lives are capable of managing high levels of stress and, since coping with stress is considered a criterion of psychological health, Antonovsky maintained that these individuals are healthier than those who possess little meaning. If it is maintained that meaning is a way of creating satisfaction from dissatisfying experiences, it seems reasonable to deduce that individuals capable of creating meaning will create satisfaction from stressful events. An example is the theistic determinist who who accepts that all events, good or bad, are "God's will" and therefore are ultimately positive and contain their own intrinsic purpose or meaning.

It is arguable that the ability to reduce the anxiety of stressful events is one criterion of psychological health. Stein's (1983) psychoanalytic interpretation of meaning, reviewed in Chapter II, is relevant here. Stein argued that certain forms of created meaning are merely

defensive manoeuvres that reduce anxiety without addressing the source or the origins of the anxiety. For example, to Stein, individuals who relegate a loved one's death to "God's will" are avoiding their grief and the inevitability of their own demise. Although individuals cope with stress by utilizing meaning, Stein argued that in using this tactic they may miss the chance to adequately cope with reality. To Stein, the ability to cope with reality is a more significant indicator of psychological health than is the ability to cope with stress.

Neither Antonovsky (1987) nor Stein (1983) provide wholly comprehensive paradigms. Meaning is not categorically health promoting, as Antonovsky maintained. Neither is meaning largely harmful to health, as Stein maintained. Stein minimized the value of reducing unavoidable stress via the creation of meaning; meaning can be a useful and positive defense against anxiety when one can do nothing about the source of anxiety. On the other hand, Stein's point that meaning is often used to escape from anxiety and thus avoid the source of anxiety is important. Therapists, ministers and other helpers may be unwittingly moving their clientele toward the non-adaptive defensive use of meaning by encouraging a highly meaningful existence, particularly when they encourage the view that meaning is "true" and "object. . ." It would be more

appropriate to encourage the view that meaning can be consciously used as a tool to assist in the coping process. With this view, individuals could better choose when to using meaning to cope with stressful events and when to act directly on the source of the stress.

Meaning and Self-Transcendence

One outcome of the general form of meaning described by Frankl (1966, 1969, 1984) is self-transcendence, or the ability to gain a perspective of one's self that is not governed by narcissistic needs and desires. Self-transcendent individuals see themselves from "above," and, it is postulated by Frankl and others, are more fully able to help themselves and others. Self-transcendence is one of the characteristics of Maslow's (1966, 1970) "self-actualizers," and Maslow also argued that meaning contributed to self-actualization. Maslow was more cautious than Frankl in assessing the value of meaning, however. Whereas Frankl maintained that self-transcendence is positive for anyone at anytime, Maslow argued that need fulfilment is an important prerequisite to self-transcendence and self-actualization. In Maslow's theory there is a "danger" in premature self-transcendence in that it could result in an individual ignoring essential deficit-needs, by-passing their fulfilment, and working towards goals that prevent the fulfilment. The example in Chapter

V of a youth finding meaning in the work of a monastery illustrates this point. The youth attempting to transcend his own psychological needs in the service of God may be later characterized by unfulfilled deficit-needs.

The cautions of Maslow (1966, 1970) regarding self-transcendence are significant. However, Frankl (1966, 1969, 1984) may have been incorrect in assuming that meaning automatically leads to self-transcendence. Self-transcendence is not a necessary outcome of creating meaning. As the excerpts in the previous section illustrate, meaning can be self-fulfilling rather than self-transcending. Individuals create meaning out of their attempts to fulfil deficit-needs such as security, love and esteem. Thus, the need-gratification necessary in Maslow's theory occurs in its natural progression, and individuals attempt to make meaning of their quest for need fulfilment. Rather than self-transcendence, individuals find self-fulfilment through meaningful need-gratification.

Meaning and Needs

Meaning created through need-gratification can be negative or positive in its impact upon psychological health. Meaning can be positive when it allows individuals to understand their needs and thus better fulfil them. It can also be positive when it allows individuals to reduce anxiety that relates to their needs (cf. Antonovsky, 1987),

delay need-gratification, and satisfy their needs when the time is right. For example, an individual for whom the need for esteem is meaningful may be in a strong position to systematically engage in activities that will bring esteem, rather than impulsively seeking esteem in inappropriate ways.

On the negative side, meaning created through needs may result in individuals fixating on needs because of the strength of the meaning associated with the needs. For example, an individual seeking esteem through political activity may experience the process as intensely meaningful. The individual's original desire for esteem, even when fulfilled, may be replaced by the meaning found in constantly improving his or her status as a politician. In this case, meaning perpetuates the quest for something that has already been adequately fulfilled. Meaning becomes functionally autonomous, and the possibility of self-transcendence has been replaced by the meaning found in self-fulfilment.

An interesting qualifier to the discussion above is Frankl's (1966, 1969, 1984) contention that meaning can assist an individual to <u>overcome</u> deficit-needs and, further, to rectify "lower" pathologies. Frankl argued that meaning in life allowed individuals to by-pass deficit needs without fulfilling them. An example he used to demonstrate this

concept was of the concentration camp prisoner who, deprived of physiological necessities and security, found meaning in the concentration camp experience and therefore could cope without lower-level need satisfaction. Whether Frankl is being overly romantic in his assessment of the power of meaning is difficult to ascertain. Certainly there is abundant anecdotal evidence to indicate that his view on this matter is correct in some cases. It can be argued that the increasing ability to make meaning throughout development allows individuals to increasingly direct their own development. In other words, sufficiently strong meanings may allow individuals to override prior developmental concerns. This contention is virtually impossible to empirically test, however.

The Effects of Meaninglessness

Meaning in life does not always lead to positive outcomes and, similarly, meaninglessness does not necessarily lead to negative outcomes. Although some psychologists claim that meaninglessness contributes to to existential neurosis (Maddi, 1967), a condition characterized by boredom and apathy, both short-term and long-term meaninglessness may be developmentally enhancing. In the short-term, the experience of meaninglessness may lead individuals to re-examine their lives and become controlling of the direction they want their lives to take.

Some theorists (e.g., Dabrowksi & Piechowski, 1977) have argued that crises associated with meaninglessness result in the advanced reorganization of personality structures. In the long-term, meaninglessness, when it is not accompanied by anxiety and despair, may allow individuals to experience life's events more directly. Wilber (1977) argued that meaning is a hindrance to direct experience because meaning-making involves conceptualizations that may distort direct experience. Making meaning involves making concepts, and concepts distract individuals from pure experience. Wilber's point was not that meaning is unhealthy; rather, it is unhealthy when meaning is substituted for experience. Wilber's view is similar to Stein's (1983): When meaning is seen as a tool that inadequately represents reality, it serves numerous practical uses. However, when meaning is taken to be reality, it may cloud our ability to perceive reality directly.

Discussion

The study of meaning in life has traditionally been conceived by "mainstream" experimental psychologists to be an endeavour too fraught with ambiguity to be worthwhile. Existential psychologists, the most prominent promoters of the study of meaning, defend research on meaning in life by arguing that the experiential and psychological benefits of meaning in life are too significant to be ignored.

Psychologists interested in the psychological and moral significance of personal meaning have exerted considerable effort toward studying the positive outcomes of meaning. They argue that meaning in life produces powerful experiences of well-being that not only contribute to the worthwhileness of life, but actually account for the individual's sense of purpose and worthwhileness. They also argue that experiences associated with meaninglessness have destructive effects. Further, psychologists concerned with meaning in life point to positive psychological products of meaning such as self-transcendence (Frankl, 1969), self-actualization (Maslow, 1966), stress adaptation (Antonovsky, 1987), psychopathology reduction (Frankl, 1969) and psychological health promotion (Antonovsky, 1987; Frankl, 1969; Yalom, 1980) when they encourage the study of meaning in life as a worthy endeavour.

That meaning may engender numerous desirable outcomes is undeniable. However, greater attention needs to be paid to the nature of these outcomes and to the potentially undesirable effects of meaning. The experiences of meaning and meaninglessness may not be as positive and negative, respectively, as they have been traditionally described. Meaning in life is an important source of satisfaction, but it may not be a necessary source of satisfaction. The descriptions of meaning in life in this chapter indicate

that the experience of meaning in life is associated with various satisfying experiences such as being loved, secure or esteemed. It is contestable whether meaning is necessary to the satisfaction of these experiences. Further, meaninglessness does not necessarily produce despair and dissatisfaction. The anxiety associated with meaning may be induced largely by cultural or personal expecations that meaninglessness should be anxiety-provoking.

Meaning in life may produce negative as well as positive psychological effects. Stein's (1983) argument that meaning is a tool that can be used in beneficial and harmful ways must be given serious consideration. When meaning is used for defensive purposes, it can divert efforts to identify and resolve sources of anxiety. The defensive use of meaning may lead to increased stress, decreased psychological health and decreased developmental growth. Meaning in life may acquire a functional autonomy that directs development in maladaptive ways.

A balanced view of the outcomes of meaning is called for. Therapists who have promoted meaning as a positive change agent have overemphasized the positive outcomes of meaning and neglected its negative products. These therapists risk imposing values on clients that may be counter-productive. Clients who lead satisfying lives without striving for meaning should perhaps be assisted to

continue doing so rather than being encouraged to create meaning. Further, individuals grappling with meaninglessness need not be encouraged to create meaning in all cases. Therapies that examine meaninglessness with a tone of desperation and anxiety may be misleading.

Meaning in life is not necessarily "good" or "bad." Researchers need to examine the effects of meaning within the context of the processes and structures used to produce meaning outcomes. The thorough study of the effects of meaning may assist therapists to better induce positive outcomes of meaning with clients.

CHAPTER VIII

DISCUSSION

A diverse range of issues regarding "meaning in life" has been analyzed in this study. The elements that comprise and influence the making of meaning are so varied that envisioning coherence or direction to the topic is difficult. Theorists and researchers concerned with the dynamics of meaning have often displayed an inability to conceptualize the whole of "meaning in life," preferring instead to examine a single facet of meaning in relative isolation of the larger perspective. Thus came the impetus for this work: to analyze meaning in life so as to begin a global manner for conceptualizing meaning in life. In this chapter, the numerous ideas regarding meaning are brought together to fulfil this purpose. This is done by: (a) providing an example of how the conceptual framework used in this work unifies the various aspects of meaning, (b) summarizing the main arguments and findings reviewed in the study and (c) describing implications for future research.

The Role of Meaning in Life

Meaning in life is not a thing that individuals either possess or do not possess; the concept "meaning in life" encapsulates a dynamic process that plays a profound role in individual lives at certain points of development. The

stance taken in this study is that "meaning in life" involves an intricate set of interrelationships between processes and structures that lead to certain outcomes. As a simple example of this conceptualization, consider the role of meaning in Albert Einstein's (Clark, 1971) life. Einstein's primary adult mode of creating meaning was through his attempts to better understand the workings of the universe. For example, the process of choosing to create meaning via physics was probably both a conscious and unconscious one. It is unlikely that his interest in science as a child was the result of conscious choices alone. Something drew Einstein to science, made the pursuit of science more appealing to him than other activities, and made the tackling scientific problems a particularly satisfying endeavour. This "something" is referred to as the set of <u>structural</u> influences on the process of meaning-making. Einstein possessed minimal control over these structural influences. He could not change, for example, his intelligence, which assisted his process of making meaning through physics especially successful; his early experience, which may have shaped his interests towards science; his unmet unconscious needs, which may have been partially fulfilled through science, or; the cultural milieu in which he was ensconced, which placed the pursuit of physics high among admirable activities. These structures

influenced his process of meaning-making, partially directing him to pursue physics as an area of meaning fulfilment. However, the structural influences did not force physics to become meaningful. Einstein had many opportunities to create meaning in other arenas, such as with his family or other forms of work.

The meaning that was fulfilled through science was created, just as was the meaning Einstein temporarily created as a patent office clerk when the prospect of becoming a professional physicist looked dim. Einstein adopted an attitudinal stance toward his conditions that formed part of his process of meaning-making. The importance of attitude became particularly apparent in the later years of Einstein's career, when his efforts to verify a non-probabilistic universe and to create a unified physics both failed. Einstein's later work did not reward him with "answers" to his questions about the universe, nor was his work highly esteemed by his colleagues, yet Einstein experienced his work as highly meaningful. Einstein's dogged attempts to demonstrate, against a considerable amount of evidence to the contrary, that God does not "play dice" with the universe could be interpreted as indicating that meaning was a defense mechanism for Einstein in his later years.

Einstein's meaning-making processes and structures

combined to produce a number of interrelated outcomes. First, Einstein experienced considerable fulfilment, satisfaction and contentment with his chosen meaning. The satisfaction he found in his work was so strong that it contributed to the demise of his first marriage and strongly influenced the nature of his second marriage. Second, Einstein's chosen meaning appears to have contributed to the development of characteristics associated with Maslow's (1970) self-actualization (e.g., a superior perception of reality, particularly in young adulthood; autonomy; problem-centredness; Gemeinschaftsgefuehl, or a deep concern for humanity). Third, Einstein's meaning was sufficiently strong to render day-to-day concerns relatively insignificant. Thus, everyday stressors were easily handled by Einstein (which, although desirable for him, made life difficult for those around him who were left coping with his difficulties!). Finally, Einstein's meaning was sufficiently strong to have possibly prevented him from developmental advancement. Einstein was "locked in" to meaning through physics, even though his later years involved interests in a less conceptual, more experiential and more "mystical" mode of living. To use Wilber's (1977) terms, Einstein was arrested at the centauric level of consciousness development because of his strong meaning. Thus, Einstein could not develop to the transpersonal level

of development, wherein meaning would play a secondary role to a more unifying manner of experiencing.

The brief example of Einstein's meaning illustrates that the outcome-process-structure analysis of the role of meaning provides a relatively integrated, systematic and complete manner for conceptualizing meaning. Further, the conceptualization allows for meaning in life to be understood from the incorporation of a variety of seemingly conflicting perspectives. In particular, the conceptualization allows meaning in life to be understood both from "reductionistic" and "humanistic/existential" perspectives. Researchers of meaning in life have typically originated from humanistic/existential schools of thought and, in their attempt to "humanize" the study of psychology, have minimized the importance of "lower level" phenomena such as defense mechanisms. On the other hand, psychoanalytic and empirically-oriented psychologists have characteristically either dismissed meaning in life as unimportant or have attempted to "explain away" meaning in a reductionistic manner. The analysis of this study has demonstrated that meaning in life is comprised of both "higher" and "lower" concerns that are not productively studied in isolation.

Significant Issues in the Study of Meaning in Life

This section summari[illegible] the main issues in the study of

meaning in life, using as an organizing guide the framework described above. The outcome-process-structure conceptualization is not entirely sufficient for the analysis of meaning, however, because the analysis depends on a philosophical assumption regarding the source of meaning. Many of the current theoretical differences between theorists of meaning arise because they disagree as to whether meaning is found or created. Chapters III and IV examined how the source of meaning has been conceptualized, examining first how conceptions of meaning have evolved historically, and second how meaning is conceived currently.

The examination of cultural semiogenesis, or the cultural evolution of meaning, was not undertaken to conclusively delineate the progression of conceptualizations of meaning throughout the ages. Rather, the examination illustrated broad trends in the evolution of meaning, trends that clarify current conceptualizations of meaning in life. The examination of cultural semiogenesis demonstrated, contrary to the view of many existential and humanistic psychologists, that meaning in life has not always been an overriding human concern. Meaning in life is a concern that has evolved in importance and form throughout human history. Conceptualizations and experiences of meaning have changed with cultural development, beginning with a global sense of universal coherence, moving to pu oses specifically

designated by an external "higher power," evolving to the grand design of natural law and recently changing to understand meaning as a human projection onto the world. These changing understandings of meaning are reflections of the methods or tools available to the human process of meaning-making. Evolving human abilities, especially cognitive powers, have allowed us to utilize magic, myth, theology, metaphysics, science, existentialism and esoteric religion as the tools by which we make meaning. The main trend has been to increasingly internalize and own meaning, and decreasingly understand meaning as an objective aspect of the universe with a reality of its own. Humans are increasingly conceptualizing meaning as their projection onto the world, increasingly understanding that the world is inherently meaningless, and increasingly lowering their expectations for the world to possess independent meaning.

To ask whether these trends in understanding meaning are "correct" or not is to pose a question that presupposes that there are objective meanings. As meaning is understood to be a human projection, so necessarily are notions of "truth." Historically, "truth" is also increasingly being understood as a human creation. There is no "observer from above" that can determine what is really true and what is not. Humans increasingly accept that they create and define truth culturally and individually, and that what is

considered true in one cultural epoch may not be considered true in another.

Emotional trends correspond to the trends in meaning-making. The understanding of meaning as an independent and objective entity provides a strong emotional security. Order, coherence and purposes are strong stimuli for emotional satisfaction and serenity. As meaning became increasingly viewed as a human creation, the apparent arbitrariness and fleeting nature of meaning caused considerable anxiety. The reaction of existential philosophers early in this century perhaps best exemplify the emotional response to the meaninglessness of the world when the expectation is held that the world should possess meaning. A new language of "dread," "angst," "nausea" and "courage" emerged to explain the emotional anxiety aroused when one realizes that the meaning one thought was "out there" has all along been personally and culturally created. This emotional reaction remains common today; many individuals have difficulty with the concept that meaning is a human creation. They understand this to mean that meaning is therefore meaningless because it is not objective. The responsibility involved in making one's own meaning appears to be overwhelming for many individuals.

In the future, it is predicted that as entrenched notions of objective meaning become dislodged, individuals

will better be able to understand meaning as a human projection without corresponding feelings of anxiety and dread. Meaning will be understood as an outstanding and unique human achievement to be proud of rather than fearful of.

The primary implication of the examination of cultural semiogenesis is that it is not viable to understand meaning in life as something to be found. In Chapter IV, it was demonstrated that Frankl's (1966, 1969, 1984) and Maslow's (1966, 1970, 1971) viewpoints that meanings possess an objective reality are difficult to defend. Frankl's and Maslow's theories are emotionally appealing because of the security implicit within the concept of objective meanings and because the subjective experience of creating meaning often feels like something has been "found." However, Frankl's and Maslow's assumptions are philosophically unconvincing.

More convincing theories are those of Blocker (1974), Kegan (1984), Stein (1983), Wilber, (1977) and atheistic existentialists (Yalom, 1980) that postulate meaning to be a human creation. To these theorists, postulating the independent existence of meaning in life is about as tenable as postulating the independent existence of language. Language, the most ubiquitous of meaning systems, is clearly a human creation. Simi ly, other meanings are humanly

created, not objectively found.

Another important similarity exists between language and meaning in life. Meaning in life is often experienced as found rather than created, evidence for some theorists that meaning is an objective entity. Similarly, language is experienced to be found by children acquiring the language of their culture. Thus, although language is a human creation, its perpetuation by culture releases individuals from having to go through the creation process. Other meanings, such as those associated with meaning in life, are similarly transmitted culturally, thus explaining the strong sense of "finding" meaning.

The processes of creating meaning were examined in Chapter V. Of particular importance to the study of meaning in life is whether meaning is created consciously or unconsciously. Humanistic and existential theorists, who traditionally have avoided explanations of behaviour that include unconscious forces, maintain that the making of meaning is a conscious process. Frankl (1969, 1984) has repeatedly argued against theorists who understand meaning in life to have unconscious roots. Frankl understood attempts to explain unconscious influences on meaning in life to be reductionistic and de-humanizing. However, unconscious processes can always be called upon to explain behaviour, and thus arguing against their influence is

rather futile. Further, the evidence of unconscious influences on other realms of behaviour renders it prudent to view the creation of meaning in life as involving conscious and unconscious processes.

The influence of hidden processes on meaning-making becomes particularly apparent when language acquisition is compared to the creation of meaning in life. Children learning language are acquiring the predominant symbol system of their culture; a system which has embedded within it other symbol systems regarding societal rules, roles and norms. Children acquire this information well before their cognitive powers enable them to conceptualize the nature of the systems they are learning. Children thus "find" and assimilate language and other symbol systems rather than create them. Similarly, social values and meanings are acquired and internalized prior to children's ability to reflect on their conceptual acquisitions. Meanings and purposes are thus "found" in much the same way that language is "found."

It is in adolescence that individuals develop the cognitive ability to reflect upon and to question in a disciplined manner their internalized meaning systems (Mitchell, 1975). The development of formal operational thought allows adolescents to intellectually evaluate previous learnin It also modifies conditions of worth

for adolescents; adolescents' worth depends on reasons that are consciously made explicit. Merely feeling worthwhile is not as convincing as being able to conceptualize worthwhileness. Adolescents who cannot conceptualize their worth may experience anxiety because their identities and their self-definitions are threatened.

Adolescents have the ability to create meaning and they do so partly to avoid anxiety. Thus, it is expected that adolescents are free to create meanings of their choosing, freely accepting or rejecting meanings "found" in childhood. This is not the complete case, however, because the conceptual process by which they evaluate previously assimilated meanings has as its predominant tool the earlier acquired symbol systems. In other words, adolescents evaluate meanings with the symbol systems in which the meanings are ensconced. Consequently, adolescents do not freely create meanings; their meaning-making is influenced, perhaps even molded, by meanings hidden to their awareness.

Adolescent and adult meanings are largely restricted by internalized social meaning systems and thus it is vital to adopt a developmental approach to conceptualizing the creation of meaning in life. Developmental approaches to meaning in life are rare, yet they offer a purchase on meaning in life that is vital to a full understanding of the phenomenon. For example, Hedlund (1987) found that adult

meanings are related to childhood events, a finding that supports the contention that adolescents and adults are not entirely free to chose their meanings.

Previously internalized symbol systems are not the only "structures" that constrain the meaning-making process. Chapter VI briefly reviewed some of the structural elements that influence the making of meaning, such as personality characteristics, early experiences, personal needs, cognitive abilities, genetic endowment and environmental conditions. The specific structures reviewed in Chapter VI are not important for this summary. Of significance is the concept that meaning in life is not created in isolation of other elements of existence. Personality characteristics influence individual interests which, in turn, influence the types of meanings that individuals perceive to be fulfilling. Early experiences also influence interests, and they often involve trauma that leave embedded and unresolved issues that are dealt with through adulthood meanings (Hedlund, 1987; Stein, 1983). Needs exert strong influences on meaning-making. Personal needs largely determine the types of meanings that will be experienced as fulfilling. Developmental cognitive changes play a large role in meaning-making because they change the tools by which individuals make their meanings. Genetic endowment sets physical, emotional and intellectual limits on individuals'

abilities to fulfil their meanings, thus strongly influencing the relative fulfilment of chosen meanings. Finally, individuals' environments provide the context in which meanings can be fulfilled. As environments change, so do the sources of meaning.

The outcomes of the process-structure interactions were examined in Chapter VII. Meaning-making produces two sets of products: experiences of "meaningfulness," and changes in personal well-being. The experience of meaningfulness is not separate from experiences of love, respect, security or success. Rather, the making of meaning is a method for sustaining and enhancing the satisfaction of all satisfying experiences. For example, individuals could be content with simply being loved (as a child is), but the ability to place love in a meaningful context acts to deepen and prolong the satisfaction. The conceptualization of meaning makes love "worth" even more than it is as an in-and-of-itself experience, thus love is more than just love.

Meaning-making is also a method for creating satisfaction from unsatisfying experiences. Numerous are the examples of individuals sacrificing personal pleasures for the sake of their meanings. For example, a mother finding meaning in raising a disabled child voluntarily foregoes many personal pleasures due to the child's demands. The power of meaning is create satisfaction from the

unpleasantries of diapers, a restricted social life and physical exhaustion. In this regard, meaning is an enormously adaptive human process in its ability to assist individuals to delay or forego gratification for later gains.

Meaning in life also produces by-products related to well-being. Although researchers have tended to focus on the positive outcomes of meaning, meaning in life is not always desirable. Meaning can improve psychological health (Frankl, 1984), reduce stress (Antonovsky, 1987), promote self-transcendence (Frankl, 1966) and lead to self-actualization (Maslow, 1966). However, meaning may also lead to stress by causing temporary anxiety-reduction without helping individuals to contend with the sources of anxiety (Stein, 1983). Meaning may unnecessarily delay need-gratification as well, leading to developmental arrest. Finally, meaning may become so strong that it results in developmental fixation.

Implications for the Study of Meaning in Life

The number of issues related to the study of meaning in life that have not been addressed in this study far exceeds the number of those that have been examined. This study examined what, to this researcher, are the most salient concerns in the study of meaning. Thus, issues such as the measurement of meaning in life, distinctions between

"meaning in life" and "purpose in life," the nature of the types of meaning in life, and therapeutic practices related to meaning in life were given only brief attention in this study. No apologies are made for the neglect of these admittedly important areas because the intent of this work was to produce an analysis of issues that would lead to the beginning of a coherent framework for the study of meaning, not to exhaustively analyze all concerns related to meaning.

The implications and recommendations for future research that arise from this work are numerous and varied. However, two central themes emerge for needed directions in the study of meaning in life. First, meaning in life needs to be studied in a more holistic fashion than it has been in the past. The outcome-process-structure organization utilized here is a useful one, but other researchers may find better ways of conceptually organizing the role of meaning in life. A conceptual framework is essential to a more advanced understanding of this topic. The second theme is that meaning in life must be conceptualized and studied developmentally. Meaning in life has traditionally been conceived to be a unitary phenomenon found only in adulthood, and little has been done to discover precursors to meaning in life or the nature of levels of meaning in life.

The Need for an Integrated Conceptual Framework

The outcome-process-structure approach to meaning in life illuminated important relationships between elements related to meaning in life. More importantly, however, it illuminated significant gaps in our understanding of the dynamics of meaning. It is these gaps that are the focus of this section.

The description of the processes of meaning-making contained in Chapter V may be criticized for being overly vague and insufficiently comprehensive. Although it is worth noting that meaning-making involves both unconscious and conscious processes, and that the creation of meaning in life is related to language development, this seems to be an inadequate manner of describing the creation of meaning. This is an important criticism that hopefully applies equally to the inadequacies of research on meaning in life as it does to the author's conceptual powers. How humans make meaning has been neglected by researchers and theoreticians. Descriptions of the process of meaning-making have typically been vague and, because they have not been directly tied to the outcomes and structures of meaning-making, have been disconnected with other elements of meaning.

What is needed is a systematic analysis of the methods individuals use to make meaning. This study will probably

best be facilitated when researchers of meaning in life increase efforts to relate meaning in life to other meaning-making processes. When meaning in life is understood to be a special form or subset of general meaning, connections can be made between the processes of meaning in life and the processes of language acquisition, symbol usage and symbol interpretation. There is little doubt that these processes are highly related; the challenge is to discover the commonalities among them.

Researchers concerned with language development have a great deal to offer researchers of meaning in life. Language acquisition is more visible and tangible than the process of creating meaning in life, and thus discoveries in that area may be more concrete and specific than those made by meaning in life researchers. Further, the study of language development has involved research on the influence of structural elements of language acquisition (e.g., cognition), and these links between meaning processes and structures are vital to the complete understanding of meaning in life.

Semiotics, or the study of symbols and signs (Blonsky, 1985), is another discipline that may facilitate discoveries for meaning in life researchers. Although this author finds semioticians exceedingly difficult to understand, the fact remains that their focus of inquiry is meaning, they

understand that meaning is created rather than discovered, and they attend to structural influences on meaning-making processes. Consequently, semioticians may be in a strong position to conceptualize meaning in a comprehensive manner.

The study of hermeneutics may also benefit researchers interested in meaning in life. It has been argued that the creation of meaning in life is a hermeneutic inquiry into the "text" of one's life. Lacan (e.g., 1985) maintained that the self <u>is</u> a text, in that it is an integrated collection of conceptions or ideas. Individuals may create meaning for their lives in a fashion similar to the ways in which they create meaning from texts.

Cognitive psychology also offers methodologies and ideas useful to meaning in life researchers. The creation of meaning in life involves conceptual analysis, decision-making, and problem-solving, all of which are within the purview of cognitive psychology. Cognitivists are concerned with the <u>how</u> of meaning and should be able to generate productive hypotheses regarding how certain meanings are chosen over others, how certain meanings are more salient than others, and how meanings change as conceptualizations change. Mahoney's (1981) research concerning the processing of meaningful information provides insight into meaning in life. To Mahoney, the brain develops "meaning systems" which serve to regulate attenti and perception. Once

meaning systems are established, they permit entry into consciousness only stimuli that are already compatible with existing meaning systems. Thus, meaning systems are designed to be self-sustaining, and change only arises with considerable disequilibrium. Mahoney's analysis may assist meaning in life researchers to approach the problem of how and why individuals change their meanings.

The main conclusion offered at this juncture is that much more needs to be known about the processes involved in creating meaning in life. A solid conceptualization of how humans make meaning is the key to appropriate therapeutic interventions involved with individuals' struggles with meaning. Frankl (1969) maintained that logotherapy does not contain intervention techniques because of the uniqueness of individual meanings. It could be that the therapy contains no techniques because meaning-making processes are not understood and thus techniques to facilitate the processes are not discoverable.

A considerable amount of the research in this thesis focused on the structural elements of meaning-making. The main limitations associated with this research are its lack of systematicity in approaching meaning structures, and its relative omission of connections between meaning in life structures and processes. Thus, although we know that cognitive capacities inf nce meaning-making, only Mitchell

(1975) and Kegan (1984) have provided coherent explanations for why and how this may be the case. Kegan's work, although currently too general for understanding meaning in life, provides an excellent model for researchers of meaning in life. The ability to relate systems of cognitive, affective and behavioural changes is a fundamental requirement in the study of meaning in life.

A thorough inquiry into the structural elements of meaning would illuminate relationships of particular importance to therapists. Knowledge of the influences of intelligence, interests, personality traits, cognition, morality, early experience, cultural influences, social influences, needs and environmental constraints would provide a powerful tool by which counsellors could help individuals to optimize their meaning-making for greater fulfilment and personal development. Frankl's (1984) logotherapy is particularly weak in this regard with its implicit assumption that life meanings can be found with equivalent methods under any life circumstances.

Meaning outcomes have received a considerable amount of attention by those studying meaning in life. However, potentially damaging and restricting products of meaning in life have been neglected by most researchers. Stein's (1983) contention that meaning is used for defensive purposes is important and appears to be valid. Therapists

require methods for assessing the relative worth of various meanings so that they do not blindly encourage any and all forms of meaning. Although the therapeutic intuition currently utilized is an indispensable assessment tool, systematic ways of assessing the needs being fulfilled by meanings, the anxiety sources being avoided via meanings, the rigidity of meanings, and the necessity of life meanings are needed. To merely encourage the client's efforts to create meaning in the hope that it will lead to self-transcendence is too little.

The experiences associated with meaning could also use greater illumination. The analysis in this study showed that the experience of meaningfulness is the experience of satisfaction, but this description does not sufficiently capture the nature of the experience. There is more to the experience of meaningfulness than simply being satisfied, but there are significant ties between satisfaction and meaning. A phenomenological examination of meaning in life could reveal how meaningfulness is different than feeling loved, esteemed, worthy or secure. At present, these distinctions are blurred.

The experience of meaninglessness also merits greater attention. The powerful descriptions penned by the existentialists describing the angst and dread of meaninglessness, although rich and profound, do not portray

meaninglessness in its entirety. Blocker's (1974) analysis of other experiences of meaninglessness, such as feelings of peace and serenity, is also an important contribution to our understanding of meaninglessness. At present, we do not know why some individuals experience intense anxiety over meaninglessness and why some become baffled at the suggestion that they should worry about meaning and meaninglessness. As this work was being written, an acquaintance was asked about her views of meaning in life and where she experienced the greatest meaning. Her response was enlightening: "You academics sure spend a lot of time thinking about things instead of experiencing life as it happens. What's wrong with just having fun and enjoying the simple pleasures?" Perhaps, meaning is not a pressing concern for this woman, perhaps it need not be, and perhaps, it should not be. It is important that therapists have a conceptual framework which permits them to determine when meaninglessness is a problem and when it is not.

The outcome-process-structure conceptualization may provide a conceptualization of the role of meaning in life. It serves to integrate the various facets of meaning, and encourages diverse approaches to the study of meaning. Within the outcome-process-structure conceptualization, humanistic, existential and phenomenological psychologists have a place in describing the outcomes and processes of

meaning-making. Cognitive, semiotic, linguistic and hermeneutic psychologists can contribute strongly to the understanding of meaning processes and structures. Developmentalists play a vital role in delineating changes in process/structure interactions. "Depth" psychologists bring a unique perspective to meaning outcomes, processes and structures.

The Need for a Developmental Perspective

The most glaring omission in the study of meaning in life is its lack of developmental perspective. Meaning in life has traditionally been conceptualized in limited and static ways. A developmental model could potentially revolutionize the way meaning is conceived. The outcome-process-structure conceptualization, although useful, is not sufficient without a method for conceiving how the outcomes, processes and structures of meaning-making change with development. Meaning takes different forms at different levels of development, involves different tools in its creation, and utilizes different processes. Without understanding the dynamics of these changes, researchers inadvertently block out some of the most significant factors in the academic investigation of meaning in life.

A developmental model that delineates the levels of meaning in life would be especially productive. The traditional concept of "meaning" as an altruistic "calling"

or "mission" applies only to one developmental period. Meanings are also found in the "selfish" gratification of needs for security, love and esteem, perhaps in a developmental sequence. Erikson (1963) argued that meanings are found in identify formation, intimacy, generativity and integrity, respectively. These distinctions are important to clarify because as the levels of meaning change, so do the outcomes, processes and structures involved in meaning. Hedlund's (1987) findings that meanings move from self-directed to other-directed is a strong beginning to the analysis of developmental changes in meaning in life.

A potentially effective way of analyzing the development of meaning is to begin with the development of structural elements of meaning. Mitchell's (1975) analysis of the transition from concrete operational thought to formal operational thought and its influence on meaning exemplifies this approach. A considerable amount is known about structural changes, such as the development of cognitive abilities. This knowledge could be utilized to identify what meaning may "look like" at different levels of cognitive, moral, social and ego development.

Another effective method for analyzing the development of meaning is the approach taken in Chapter III, the analysis of cultural semiogenesis. Although ontogeny does not necessarily recapitulate phylogeny, tracing cultural

changes in meaning-making serves as a valuable heuristic for conceptualizing the development of individual meaning-making. This is an especially worthy method if it is accepted that "truth" and "meaning" are culturally created. When meaning is understood to be a cultural and individual projection, and when truth is conceived to be consensually validated meanings, the examination of cultural meaning-systems is vital to understanding individual meanings.

Conclusion

This study analyzed selected issues in the study of meaning in life. Underlying the analysis were the assumptions that meaning in life will be best understood when it is conceived holistically and developmentally. Significant areas of weakness were found in existing approaches to meaning in life, and some attempts were made to suggest how these shortcomings can be strengthened. Criticizing the work of others is the least difficult task of a theorist; those whose work came under scrutiny in this study engaged in the considerably more difficult task of creating concepts. The challenge of creating new and encompassing ways of conceptualizing meaning in life remains for those with the courage and determination to go out on a conceptual limb and face those of us who feel much more secure criticizing the a ons of others. The challenge is well worth taking. To r at La Barre's words:

> Man is like an existential spider, who spreads out a moral net of symbolism over the void out of his own substance--and then walks upon it. (1962, p. 67)

The theorists reviewed in this work have helped us to understand how this net is made; their work should not go unfinished.

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